These are the novel illustrations that were included in volume 2

大伝説の勇者の伝説2

明日をも知れぬ大合戦

ライナはフェリスが
寝かされているベッドの横に座り、
心配げな顔で彼女を見ている。
そんな様子にキファは……

Character Introduction

Ryner Lute

Possesses a special type of cursed eyes known as the **Alpha Stigma**, capable of wielding strong magic. Basically a lethargic, unmotivated individual.

Ferris Eris

Ryner's partner. An expert swordswoman with unparallel beauty. Loves dango, a believer of the God of Dango.

Roland Empire

Sion Astal

Originally a prince born of a commoner mistress, the hero who spearheaded a revolution, and the current King of Roland who is well-liked by his people.

Lucile Eris

Ferris's elder brother, the head of the Eris family that for generations has been tasked to serve as personal guard to the King of Roland.

Miran Froaude

Sion's close aide. Works in the shadows, undertakes covert missions and any dark deeds.

Claugh Klom

Grand Field Marshal overseeing the whole of Roland's army.

Noa Ehn

Princess of Estabul which has merged with Roland.

Milk Callad

Ryner's childhood friend, employed in the military, Also in the Taboo Breaker squad

Kiefer Knolles

Spy for Roland Empire. Currently confined in Gastark.

Riura Luteluu

Self-proclaimed to be the father of Ryner. True identity unknown.

Gastark Empire

Refal Edia

Single-eyed King of the fast expanding Gastark Empire.

Lir Orla, Sui Orla, Kuu Orla

Agents of Gastark. Ryner and company had encountered them before.

Chapter 1 - The Balance Scales For Emptiness And Darkness

“Do you know the way to sever darkness?”

She remembered that conversation from a long time ago.

"The way to sever darkness?"

The young Ferris tilted her small head to one side and looked up at her brother.

The place was in the garden of her home. A moonless night.

She was just ten.

"....."

How old was Lucile?

She pondered.

She could see that he was already an adult. No, it was as always. He was always perfect, with a level of strength which she could not even come close to.

That’s why Ferris looked up at Lucile. As always. It was as if he was in faraway place above where she could not touch him, that’s how she was looking up at him.

Lucile then looked down at her with an expression of love, smiled faintly, and said something incomprehensible again.

"That’s right. The way to sever darkness. Does Ferris know?"

Once again, Ferris tilted her head.

"Can darkness be severed?"

"Yes, it can..... rather, there is nothing that the sword of an Eris can’t sever..... there shouldn’t be."

"There shouldn't be?"

Lucile smiled at Ferris's query.

"Yes, that should be the case however..... the truth is, I myself am yet unable to sever darkness. I'm practicing though."

"Nii-sama is practicing on severing darkness?"

"Yes. The Ferris now, iron....."

"I can cut iron."

"Oh, is that so? Ferris is such an excellent girl."

But Ferris shook her head at that.

"Tou-sama and Kaa-sama think otherwise. They kept saying that different from Nii-sama, I'm a piece of trash."

She said calmly, expressionlessly.

And Lucile put his hand on her head, and gently ruffle her hair in a stroking manner.

"Whatever Tou-sama and Kaa-sama say, you are excellent, Ferris. Have some confidence. You carry in you a radiant light which I do not have."

"Light?"

"That's right."

"I carry in me something that Nii-sama doesn't have?"

"That's right. That's why someday, you will have a way of severing darkness that's different from mine."

"..... sever darkness?"

"Yes."

"I'm going to be able to sever darkness?"

"Yes."

"..... but what will that be for?"

Why would I want to sever darkness?

Ferris was doubtful about that. That's why she asked that question.

But Lucile did not gave her an answer. He only smiled gently.

"Even if I don't explain it, you will be able to do it in time."

That was what he had said.

But now, she was filled with regret.

She regretted not asking exactly how does one sever darkness then.

The way to sever black, deep darkness, why didn't I ask about it, she blamed herself.

The reason was because she was now in the middle of a dark, despairing situation.

And she was shaking uncontrollably in fear of what was before her.

The sky was still dark; it was early morning.

The place was at the side of a highway somewhat north of Reylude, the capital of Roland Empire.

Ferris's whole body was covered in blood, unable to move at all. Beasts and snakes made out of shadows were biting into her arms and legs, rendering her immobile.

And before her, was a darkness which was darker than even night, and a growing hopelessness.

The man who was completely adorned with black was about to kill her sister.

The man --- Froaude, laughed. He laughed thinly with his mouth wide open, a mouth bordered with devilish red lips.

And he. And he was about to throw the blood-drenched Iris into the midst of the ten shadow beasts that had been born at his feet.

Stop, Ferris cried out.

But that voice reached no one.

Please stop, Ferris yelled.

But that voice reached nowhere.

Merely, merely, the dark despair before her merely continued to swell.

Ferris was fearful.

Her arms and legs were already horribly cut up, and looked as if they were about to tear off, rendering her unable to move.

But yet, Ryner did not come and save them.

And on top of that, Sion --- Sion was the master of this man.

That became a shocking kind of hopelessness.

Everything seemed to turn black.

But yet, she continued to holler. In order to sever darkness. In order to call out to the light.

“Why..... why didn’t you come save us! Ryner! I’m right here! Hurry!”

But, that voice, without a doubt, reached no one.

“Save us Ryner!!”

That voice could not sever darkness.

The world was turning increasingly dark, descending into a state of gloomy melancholy.

Froaude carried a thin smile.

“Stop!!”

Ferris hollered.

But, he didn’t stop.

“Please, I beg of you..... I beg of you, please stop.....”

But, he didn’t stop.

Froaude only smiled mockingly.

And released his grip.

Iris fell.

Her sister fell into the midst of the dark beasts.

“No.”

On the spur of the moment, Ferris’s body seemed to want to

react in an attempt to save her sister. But, her body refused to move. There was a shredding sound from the tendons of her arms and legs, and it seemed like she was completely no longer able to move anymore.

“Ugh, it can’t be!”

She screamed.

“It can’t be!”

She screamed.

But it was.

The darkness before her was increasingly thickening.

The beasts of darkness, started devouring the slender arms, legs, and stomach of Iris.

“Iriss!?”

Ferris shrieked.

A tearful shriek.

Iris was squirming furiously. As the beasts were devouring her, blood was spurting from every part of her body while she squirmed furiously.

“Ir, Iris!? Iris!?”

Despite having the tendons of her limbs torn up, Ferris frantically tried to get her body to move.

“Iris, I, I’m coming to save you now, just wait there. Just a little more.....”

She could let her arms be torn off.

If she did that, if she did that, she could inch closer to her sister.....

But, at that moment.

The worst possible thing happened.

Froaude waved his finger lightly, and one of the beasts brought its teeth to Iris’s neck.

“Stop.”

And started sinking its teeth in.

“Please stop.”

And her head.

“.....”

Ferris let out another shriek.

A shriek so loud that it could tear her vocal chords into shreds, a throat-tearing shriek.

Terribly.

Because the world was a terribly cruel place.

Shrouded in a thick fog of darkness, the world which was no longer visible from that darkness was a terribly cruel place.

"Do you know the way to sever darkness?"

She didn’t know.

This darkness. She thought that she wouldn’t be able to sever such intense darkness.

Her sister died in front of her.

And all she could do was watch.

No, soon, she was going to die herself. She lost too much blood. Her consciousness was getting hazier, taking away her ability to process what was happening.

Her vision was getting darker.

Her consciousness started fading away.

It was futile, she thought.

Whatever she did would be futile, she thought.

But,

“.....”

Within that fading consciousness.

Within that darkness that was looming over her, suddenly, she found an even deeper darkness.

“.....”

That was beside Froaude.

That darkness appeared above the beasts that were devouring Iris.

It was a man. A man, cloaked in darkness, appeared.

And that man said.

“Steel with dark grey wings.”

He murmured softly and lightly waved his hand.

Instantly.

The beasts around Iris abruptly disappeared without a trace.

On top of that, the wide shadow at the feet of Froaude vanished, as if it was devoured by something else.

The darkness was severed by an even darker darkness.

Then that man slowly looked down at the ground. He gently carried the cut-up blood-soaked body of Iris.

And he turned his head around to look at Ferris.

Looking intently, straight at her.

Those eyes.

That figure.

That darkness was something familiar to Ferris.

Having the same blond hair as her, and the same extraordinary perfect features.

Her brother, Lucile Eris.

Lucile was looking down at her.

Ferris, who looked as if she was about to cry, looked up at Lucile.

It was the same as that time when she was ten.

She looked up at her brother from a faraway place, unable to reach him, and with a cracked voice, said.

“Ni, Nii-sama.....”

Her brother smiled. With a gentle expression. He gave off a look as if nothing bad had happened here.

He looked intently at her, and with a calm gentle voice, said.

“..... there is no need to make such a face, everything will be okay, Ferris. Since I’ve come, I will not let anyone lay a finger on you guys anymore.”

“But, but Iris is already.....”

But Lucile said,

“Iris is alright.”

He showed her their sister whom he was carrying in his arms.

Something unbelievable had happened. What was supposed to be a cut-up, blood-soaked body of Iris, had not a single wound on her body.

Rather, there was not a single drop of blood visible on her.

Her sister, with a peaceful look, was sleeping in Lucile’s arms, against his chest.

“How, how..... Iris.....”

As Ferris began, Lucile, in order to set her mind at ease, nodded and said.

“Didn’t I say it earlier? I’ve come. That’s why there is nothing for you to worry about anymore, Ferris.”

At the moment, Lucile again raised his hand.

As he did so, the shadow monsters that were restraining her vanished,

“Ah.....”

As the restraining forces disappeared suddenly, she started falling to the ground.

But immediately, somebody supported her body before that happened.

Not knowing how his movements occurred, before she knew it, he hugged her from behind.

“..... are you alright? Ferris.”

Her brother’s voice sounded beside her ear.

But she could not respond to that voice. She truly had already lost a lot of blood.

It was a wonder that she was still alive.

Die.

She knew that.

Her temperature was falling, and soon she would die.

She knew that.

It was awfully cold. Her body was awfully cold.

But yet.

For some reason, she was not afraid. She did not feel alone. What she felt was the warmth from behind her, giving her a sense of peace.

It was an unfathomable feeling.

She had experienced that same feeling in the past.

That was a memory of a long time ago.

It was so long ago that she had almost forgotten about it.

Ferris suddenly recalled that memory in which she was hugged from behind.

It was a memory of a time when she was putting her life on the line.

It was a memory of her who, as usual, was risking getting killed by her father and mother.

With a blood-soaked body, after being dumped in the wilderness, she was hugged by her brother in the same manner.

It was the same warmth.

Peace.

And.

“.....”

And during that time, she remembered hearing her brother say something strange.

She slowly recalled those words.

Lucile was hugging the blood-soaked Ferris and said.

"It's alright. Everything is fine now. I'll protect you. From this darkness, I'll save you."

At that time, Ferris could not comprehend a single thing.

No, it was the same as right now. She couldn't understand what her brother was saying, and what he wished to do.

But, with a sad face, her brother continued.

"The curse. I alone shall bear this crazy curse. That's why there is no longer anything for you to worry about."

Curse. That's right. That was what Nii-sama had said.

But what was that all about? What was her brother trying to tell her?

Ferris recalled. Her brother's face during that time. Her brother's words.

"That's why there is nothing for you to feel troubled about. Since I will make use of the ***Sacrificial Demon*** *and the* ***Stupid Hero*** *to sever this darkness. That's why you should go outside. And walk under the light. I alone shall walk in the darkness."*

That was what he had said.

The Ferris then could not comprehend a single thing her brother spoke about, and did not say anything.

It just felt good to be hugged.

Not once.

Because not once since she was born had she experienced the feeling of being hugged before that incident, that's why her brother's warmth felt good, and she did not say anything.

But.

"....."

Ferris opened her eyes slightly.

Above her face, was the face of her brother, Lucile.

He was holding Ferris in her arms, and looking down at Ferris with love.

Looking intently at that face, Ferris said.

"I've remembered some of the past....."

But Lucile interrupted her.

"It's okay not to remember."

"But."

"It's fine, Ferris. There is nothing for you to worry about. I'll handle the troublesome stuff..... rest well. When you awake, everything will already be over."

Lucile moved his hands over her eyes in order to close them.

As he did so, her vision began to darken again, and all of a sudden, she became drowsy.

She was clearly aware of what her brother was doing to her.

He was forcibly snatching away her awareness from her entire body.

Ferris frowned.

Please wait, Nii-sama..... she wanted to say, but no voice was heard. Her entire body went limp against her brother's body.

It was something abnormal, a special ability.

But where in the world did her brother acquire such an ability?

Again, Ferris felt that her brother was far away from her. As always, in an unreachable place, in an incomprehensible place, in an untouchable place, a faraway place, she felt.

It was as always.

Lucile, her brother was shouldering everything, and seemed to be in a place which was enough to make her fearful. What was her brother doing now? What was he thinking of? She could not even understand that.

But still, she couldn't ask. Because she remembered.

She remembered once again.

The memory of that day.

The words of that day.

The words he said after saving me that day.

Her mother's head flew.

Her father's body ruptured.

While I was bathed in their blood, Nii-sama turned around with a kind expression on his face.

And.

"Now..... there's nothing to fear any more, Ferris. Everything has ended. From here on, I'll be protecting you."

As a child, she could only shake in fear at those words.

He was not a human, but a monster who was in a faraway place, and she could only shake.

But she could not ask.

Such as *where did you go*.

Such as *what in the world did you do*.

What in the world did my brother...

In order to save me, what had my brother done?

Ferris opened her eyes and looked up at her brother.

With a cracked voice, she said,

"Nii-sama....."

But her words stopped there.

Lucile, in a soft voice,

"Sleep."

At that instant, she lost her awareness.

Her consciousness faded away swiftly.

Feeling good from his strong, warm embrace, she could not

think of anything anymore.

Her consciousness was carried away by a strong force.

Ferris could not resist that force.

All her remaining strength left her, and leaving her body in the care of Lucile, she closed her eyes.

Her vision became dark, dark.

“.....”

She fell into darkness, and everything around her disappeared.

That scene.

Miran Froaude looked at that scene with a pair of cold eyes.

The monster gently lay his sisters down on the ground.

Ferris Eris and Iris Eris.

Looking down at his beautiful sisters, Lucile held out his hand.

“My life, to transfer.”

As he murmured softly, the space in his hands blurred and a golden sword appeared, and he thrusted the sword into Ferris chest.

As he did that, something unbelievable happened. Her limbs, which should already have been badly torn began patching themselves and the wounds she incurred started closing up.

Her evidently fatal wounds, which should be impossible to be healed by magic, for some reason, were disappearing.

Looking at that, without thinking, Froaude smiled wryly.

Is such a thing really possible?

The scene looked like Lucile was bestowing his own life force to his sister.

At that instant, he wanted to ask *if you do that, won't your life span decrease?* to Lucile, but then realized how stupid that question was and let it pass.

A mad monster like him won't be interested in his own life.

But.

"..... as one would expect, even a person like you will be fearful for his sisters' lives."

As Froaude said that, Lucile looked at him. With blue eyes so deep that one could not see the extent of that depth, he smiled.

"In order to ascertain that, you actually went to all that trouble to injure my sisters?"

"No no. Of course not. The reason I attacked Ferris-san was to make her a hostage to capture a certain **Alpha Stigma** bearer....."

Lucile responded delightedly.

"If you kill her, you can't make a hostage, can you?"

"No. I did not intend to kill her."

"That was unintentional?"

“Yes. Your sisters were just too adorable..... and unintentionally, I seemed to almost kill.....”

“Haha. So you have that kind of hobby.”

Froaude smiled weakly as an acknowledgement to that.

But of course, he had no such hobby.

He had no intention of wasting his energy on such a thing. His true purpose right from the beginning was to test the reaction of Lucile.

Rather, was it more accurate to say that he wanted to find the weakness of Lucile?

While it would be great to keep them as hostages to use against Ryner Lute, he really wanted to find a weakness of this monster that was shrouded in mystery, but outside of his expectations, Lucile arrived at the scene late, at the point where he almost killed Ferris Eris and Iris Eris.

Well, if he did kill them, it would be fine as well.

But.

“.....”

But Lucile came to save them.

This monster, took the trouble to leave His Majesty’s side, and came to save his sisters.

Now.

Froaude thought.

Now, what can I conclude from the actions of this Lucile Eris?

Froaude thought.

Clearly, there was an inconsistency to Lucile Eris's actions this time.

At the beginning, when Froaude first met Lucile, he was under the impression that this man would never take the trouble to help his useless sisters out. Froaude could see existing within him a darkness that was much similar to his own, except that it was much darker and deeper.

That's why when he first attacked Ferris and Iris, he thought that the chances of him coming to save them were pretty low.

But he was wrong.

Lucile came to save them.

At the very least, this meant that the possibility existed in that his two sisters could become his weakness.

But regarding that, there was a further question. If he's going to save them anyway, why not do it earlier?

If it's him.

If it's this monster, however far he was, he could move across distances in an instant, and could have come here to save them earlier --- that's the way Froaude saw it.

If that's the case, he could have come and saved them right from the beginning.

He could have come and saved them before they got wounded.

But he didn't. No, was it because he couldn't?

Whichever the case,

“.....”

Wasn’t it the case that..... Lucile Eris’s power extended across the entire land of this country?

Froaude squinted his eyes and looked intently at Lucile.

Just as he did that, Lucile withdrew that golden sword which had appeared from out of nowhere, from Ferris.

It seemed like he had finished healing his sister’s wounds. The wounds which would have been fatal without a doubt, had completely disappeared without a trace from the body of Ferris Eris. Even her clothes which were ripped into shreds were restored.

It was if she had been returned to the state before she was attacked, an abnormal power indeed.

After ascertaining that, Froaude said.

“I have some questions.”

“What is it?”

“Could it be that you are angry over your sisters’ injuries?”

But Lucile shook his head.

“No.”

And he looked at the black ring that Froaude was wearing, and then looked down at the once again expanded shadow at his feet, and smiled.

“It’s their own fault for not even being able to match up with an opponent of underling class.”

Then Froaude laughed.

“Underling..... is it?”

At the same time, he was once again surrounded by his black, shadow beasts.

Kagerou (Shadow Beasts). Conjured by the ring he was wearing, **The Ring of The Dark Emperor**.

Their movements are fast and sharp. At a level that normal human beings are unable to follow. No, even the mage knights would not be able to come close to their level of power.

However, even so, compared to the monster, they were nothing more than the level of henchmen weaklings. And that was the very truth. That was the level of power hidden within the monster.

If he wished, he could kill Froaude in the blink of an eye.

“.....”

Froaude deployed the shadow beasts in front of him. If the monster felt like it, and had decided to kill him off, he would probably be able to stop his movements for about one second, it seemed.

Lucile smiled again.

“Are you afraid?”

To his query, Froaude made an affirmation promptly.

“..... there isn’t anyone who won’t be afraid while standing before you, isn’t that so?”

“You did mention that you aren’t afraid, didn’t you? Or at the very least, you aren’t afraid of death.”

“Of course, I’m not afraid of death. But..... now is not the right time for me to die yet.”

Lucile smiled again.

“Not the right time? Haha. You do say some interesting things. Who can actually decide on the time of his death, you should be one who is well aware of that, aren’t you? Even if one does not want to die, when it’s time to die, one has to die, there are also times when one has to live even if he doesn’t want to. Now.”

After saying that, he softly held out his hand.

“Now. Which one do you belong to?”

Froaude tensed up his whole body. He clenched his fist tighter and increased his strength of his grip on his ring. When he did that, the shadows became stronger and larger.

But he knew very well that it was a meaningless move.

To go against such a monster.

Froaude was well aware of the fact that going against the worst monster of Roland with merely such level of strength was like hitting a rock with an egg.

Lucile smiled at the shadow beasts conjured by Froaude.

“Do you think that somehow or another, those things can actually do something to me?”

Froaude shook his head.

“No way.”

“Then, what kind of front is this?”

“Who knows? What could it be?”

As he said that, a dark, acute smile floated on Froaude’s lips. Following that, he waved his right hand. He waved that black, pitch-black ring.

Instantly.

The black beasts at the foot of Froaude sprung forward.

Three beasts were running towards Lucile to attack him.

Of course, he was well aware of the fact that this was meaningless. Lucile dispelled the beasts by just a mere wave of his hand.

No, there was something more.

“.....n.”

Froaude realized something strange was flying towards him, coming from where Lucile waved his hand.

It was like a shockwave, invisible to his eyes.....

At that moment.

Froaude’s right arm was sliced off from his body and sent flying into the air.

“Gah.”

Blood was spraying.

His right shoulder felt an excruciating amount of pain. Then Froaude looked at his right arm. The cut was abnormally clean and neat. He had no idea what was it that had cut him.....

Was it the blade of a sword that came flying?

Froaude looked at Lucile.

Lucile, with a cheerful face, while gazing at Froaude, waved his hand again as if he was toying with him. Once again, he felt something he couldn’t see. Froaude read the path of that unseen force. He lowered his body, and jumped to the side.

Immediately after.

The ground where he originally was standing at was cleaved apart. The ground was cracked open. The split of the ground from that cleaving force was so very deep that the bottom was not visible at all.

It was clear that this was not the work of a human being.

No, it was neither the power of **Rhule Fragmei** as well.

It was as if that came from a god, or demon.....

“.....”

But at that thought, Froaude became doubtful.

God, or demon?

How can it be?

How can a man, with a faltering heart like his, who is fearful of his sisters dying, possess the power of a god?”

Laughable.

Truly laughable.

“.....”

Froaude caught hold of his severed right arm, which had been spinning in the air --- the ring on that arm to be precise, and waved it.

And then.

“Let there, be darkness.”

Darkness was born from those words once more. But not any

of the beasts. A blade. A single blade. Concentrated into that blade, was all of Froaude's power..... equating to all the shadow beasts that he could summon.

Small, fine, strong, hard, sharp.

Gathering all his power at one point.....

"What do you intend?"

Lucile smiled as he looked at him. With a *you can't touch me with that puny power* look on his face, he looked at him.

Of course, Froaude knew that.

With such a level of power, he knew that it was not possible to even graze him in the slightest.

But still, even so, Froaude gripped the blade of darkness in his left hand.

And said.

"I'm going to kill you right here."

Lucile smiled.

"What a boring joke."

"Not really, I thought it was pretty interesting myself though. But if you are so confident, why don't you receive this attack without dispelling the blade?"

As he said that, Froaude plunged the blade into the ground.

There was strange 'gusha' sound and the soil around the sunken blade started to liquefy.

That was the power imbued into the blade.

But even as he was watching, as expected, Lucile did not move an inch. A thin smile floated on his lips as if he were mocking Froaude,

“If it pleases you, I shall receive it.”

“Certainly.”

“So be it. Then do.....”

But at that moment.

Lucile’s voice trailed off.

With a slightly surprised expression, he looked intently at Froaude.

And once again, a thin smile floated on his lips.

“..... ah, I see. This time round..... so that’s what it’s supposed to be.”

And for the very first time, Froaude had a relaxed smile on his face.

“Yes. That’s what it’s supposed to be.”

During the time they were conversing, Froaude had sent the buried blade underground, to emerge from a completely different location.

And that location was just next to the head of the fallen Ferris Eris.

If Froaude sent the command from his mind, Ferris Eris’s head could be lopped off immediately.

Of course, Lucile could easily defend against that.

However.

Froaude had another move put in place beforehand.

That was at a place far from here. South of this highway, in Roland Empire's castle, where the king was.

At that place were assassins sent by Froaude, who should be about to take Sion's head with their knives.

That's right.

In other words, that was what Froaude was really up to.

Firstly, to find out whether Lucile would come save his sisters.

If he did, then Froaude would attack both Sion Astal, the king in the royal castle whom Lucile was supposed to guard, and Lucile's sisters at the same time, and see who he would choose to save.

Now.

"The swords-clan that is supposed to guard the king for generations..... who will you choose to save?"

As Froaude said that, Lucile looked at him, and said,

"In order to research this, you're actually willing to put your own life in danger?"

Froaude replied,

"It's not about that. To me, it's not something as simple as satisfying my own curiosity. It's all thanks to the Eris House for protecting the king, that we are able to leave the king's side to perform our duties with a peace of mind. But if you can turn traitorous just because your sisters are taken hostage, then it won't do if I don't think of a counter-measure. That's why the

earlier.....”

“An experiment?”

“Yes.”

“And?”

“The results are not out yet. This is it. Currently, I’m after both the lives of His Majesty and Ferris-san. Who would you choose to save, I await to be enlightened.”

But Lucile continued smiling.

“You are really an interesting man..... I don’t think there is any meaning to such an experiment though.”

“I won’t know unless I try.....”

“You would.”

Lucile said, interrupting Froaude’s words.

Lucile again waved his hand lightly. As he did that, the blade of darkness conjured by Froaude was dispelled.

And then Froaude began,

“..... so you are choosing your sister?”

Looking intently at Froaude, Lucile cheerfully shrugged his shoulders.

“The assassins around Sion are already sliced into pieces.”

At those words,

“.....”

He had again gained a little more understanding regarding this monster.

Froaude's eyes had never left Lucile all this while. Therefore, based on that, Lucile should not have left this place at all.

But he said that he had killed off the assassins who were after Sion's life.

What did he mean by that?

Could it be that Lucile Eris is actually two people?

No, that line of thought did not seem to come anywhere close to the truth. Then, what is it? Don't tell me that the person in front of me right now is actually an illusion?''

Could it be something else.....

At that moment, Froaude's thoughts were interrupted by Lucile's words.

"That, just now, was a service for you, Miran Froaude-kun."

"..... service?"

"Yes. Well, needless to say..... there was no real need to kill off those assassins around Sion. Because you didn't order them to actually kill Sion, right? Since you won't be able to kill Sion after all."

"....."

That was the truth.

Froaude only ordered the assassins to pretend they want to kill Sion.

It's only natural. There was no reason for him to sacrifice his

master's life for the sake of a trivial experiment.

However, if he already knew that,

"But, I still killed them to show you. Do you know why?"

"Tell me about it."

Froaude shrugged his shoulders. But, since there was nothing attached to his right side, only his left shoulder bobbed up, which felt unpleasant to him. He turned his sight to his right shoulder for a moment and then looked at Lucile.

"Why's that so?"

Lucile smiled and said.

"Because you are an interesting fella. This is the first time I've encountered someone who will square off with me in such a manner. That's why, even though it's not much, I felt like doing you a service."

"Hoh."

"As a reward for your capability, I shall let you in on a secret. I shall tell you what you really want to know. About my power. About my weakness. It is as you have thought. In truth, I no longer have a physical body. My form here is incorporeal."

"Incorporeal?"

"Yes. That's why....."

At that moment, Lucile vanished suddenly.

In the next instant, he appeared right behind Froaude.

"That's why while I exist nowhere, I can exist anywhere."

And then Froaude turned around slowly, and gazed at that beautiful man with sheer delight.

“..... does that equate to being able to be in two places at the same time?”

Lucile nodded.

“Anywhere. If need be, shall I show you two of me right now?”

Froaude shook his head at that.

“It’s fine. It’s not like I’m doubting your words.”

“Is that so?”

“Yes.”

“Really? It seems to me however that you don’t believe a single thing I say.”

Froaude smiled.

“No, really. I’m not doubting you at all.”

But a little.

Isn’t he a little too talkative?

Froaude thought.

When people become overly talkative, it means that they have something to hide.

And right now, in Froaude’s eyes, Lucile Eris was hiding something.

But what is it?

What is it that he was trying to hide?

Or am I over-thinking things? To this monster, everything is just a time-killer, isn't this just something on a spur of a moment, something for him to play around with, something to kill time?

"....."

But in his heart, he doubted that.

It didn't look like it. This fella just wouldn't do such unnecessary things.

Right now, clearly, he was hiding something.

Perhaps there was some reason for doing that which was unknown to him, but he could see that Lucile was hiding something.

In order not to let Froaude grab hold of his weakness.

In order not to let Froaude become suspicious of something important.

However.

"....."

What in the world would that be?

What was he up to?

Froaude looked intently at Lucile. Looking at the extraordinary perfect face of the monster.

And he tried to peek into the heart of that monster.

He stretched out his hand towards the depths of the monster's

heart, as if he was about to gouge out the truth that was hidden in the deep, dark recesses.

Then.

“.....”

Then, Froaude said.

“..... you’ve gotten me. Well, if you can protect both His Majesty and your sisters..... I have no complaints at all. I shall withdraw from hereon.”

“Is that so?”

“Yes. I’m more than satisfied with seeing that level of power. I can now confidently leave His Majesty’s life in your hands.”

“Then, you’ve already satisfied your curiosity.”

“Yes. At the very least, at the expense of one arm, I’ve more than satisfied my curiosity.”

As he said that, Froaude looked at this right arm again. By the way, the bleeding had not yet stopped.

Lucile began,

“Shall I fix that for you?”

As he said that, without answering, Froaude commanded the shadows from his mind.

As he did that, the shadow at his feet reacted. A small spherical mass of shadow flew out from the ground and covered the wound on his right shoulder.

Subsequently, another one of them flew out and covered the wound of the severed right arm.

Then, the two shadows started joining together.

This should rejoin the right arm to the body. Though this was actually the first time his arm was severed, and he wasn't really confident whether it would go well or not, but he had read from the ancient text left behind by his ancestor that such a use actually existed with **The Ring of the Dark Emperor**.

The ancient text of that detestable ancestor, the Holy Knight Halford Miran.

Froaude tried moving his newly reattached arm. Following that, he tried moving his fingers.

"..... n."

Though he was feeling a kind of faint numbing pain, the movements felt more or less the same as before.

Lucile had a slightly surprised look on his face,

"Hoh. Impressive."

"No, it's nothing compared to your power."

At any rate, Lucile had shown him the ability to heal someone who was on the verge of death. After being shown such level of power, he was not pleased in the slightest at being told that he was 'impressive'.

After smiling faintly, Lucile said.

"So, what are you going to do now?"

Froaude turned his eyes to look at the fallen Ferris on the ground,

"I'm going to capture Ryner Lute. According to my intelligence, he is now up north at the fork of the highway..... using Ferris-

san as the hostage.”

“I don’t mind. Use her as you wish. But.....”

At that, Froaude nodded.

“It’ll be alright. I won’t hurt her. I fully understand how precious your sisters are to you.”

“Then, do as you like.”

Lucile said. Then, he turned around. Seemingly about to disappear.

And then Froaude continued.

“But well, if you were to capture Ryner-san for me, that would be the most comforting.....”

But before he finished, Lucile had already disappeared. It was if there was nothing there right from the beginning, his existence, his presence, his figure, all of them vanished completely.

Froaude looked intently at the place where Lucile had disappeared.

Then,

“..... incorporeal huh.”

He murmured.

Was that really the truth?

He tried recalling the words of Lucile just a while ago.

The words he said when he mentioned that he was incorporeal.

He had hardly any physical form. He existed nowhere. But that was why he could exist anywhere.

Lucile had said that.

In other words, wherever Froaude was, whatever he was doing, would be monitored and could be dealt with, that's what it meant.

But was that really true?

"....."

Froaude looked down at the beautiful, fallen sisters lying on the ground. He looked at the two young ladies who were almost killed by him earlier.

And thought.

If Lucile truly could exist anywhere, and could extend his vision across the land, then why didn't he come save his sisters before they were on the verge of death?

With regards to the assassins around Sion, whom Froaude had dispatched, Lucile could indeed sense them while he was here and had dealt with them.

But why could he not do the same for his sisters?

No, perhaps the truth was.

"..... am I really taken to be of underling class whom he thought his sisters could defeat?"

Froaude murmured, but then shook his head. *That couldn't have been the case. Ferris Eris's strength is still way below mine.*

And Lucile could not possibly be unaware of that.

Then why was he late in saving them?

At that thought, Froaude recalled the legend behind the Eris House.

For generations, the Eris House has served the king as guards.

Within the country where their protection extends, there is none who can come close to touching the king.

When reading that part of the legend, it basically meant that within the borders of Roland, the king's safety was guaranteed, but if one turned that around, it could also mean that if the king were to travel out of Roland, the Eris House could no longer extend their protection to him.

In truth, during the time when Sion went to Imperial Nelpha for a diplomatic visit, Lucile did not follow along.

But was it because he did not go.

Or was it because he could not go.

If it were the later, what would it mean in what took place just now?

Lucile could not leave the country.

Lucile could save Sion, in the castle at the heart of Roland, just right before he was attacked.

But if it were some distance away from the castle. Perhaps, if it were at the highway near the borders of Nelpha or Runa, he would need more time before he could come save his sisters. And what happened earlier was such that if he were late by

another second, everything would have been too late.

Now.

How did these three things add up?

What did these facts indicate?

The answer was this.

“..... if he stepped out of the centre of Roland, depending on the distance.....”

Lucile Eris becomes weaker.

And that was just talking about Roland. If he were to continue putting his distance away from the centre, and step out of Roland.....

“He probably couldn’t even maintain that form, eh? What do you say? Duke Eris?”

To that question.

“.....”

There was no answer from Lucile.

No, rather.

He could not answer. *You can’t respond to my question*,

“Because you can’t hear me.”

“.....”

“Even though you said that you can exist anywhere but in truth..... your sight has yet to extend to here.”

“.....”

“That’s why you were late in coming.”

“.....”

“That’s why you were late in coming to save your sisters.”

“.....”

“But then again, that didn’t seem like a huge weakness. Still, you are a humongous monster, bearing deep darkness that is beyond mine..... but yet.....”

What in the world is he afraid of?

Froaude asked himself.

What was the weakness he possess that there was a need to become talkative in an attempt to hide it behind those words?

Froaude turned his eyes and looked away.

The answer was.

“.....”

It was already out.

At that moment, Froaude’s red lips parted widely, and a smile floated. A dark, devilish smile.

Lucile came to save his sisters.

The greatest monster of Roland had come to save his sisters.

Was that proof of a shred of humanity left in him?

Or was it because of sibling love?

Sentiments?

No, it wasn't.

For a monster of that level, he didn't think he would waste his energy on such trivial stuff. He wouldn't waste his energy on meaningless things.

Then why did he come save his sisters?

The reason was simple.

"....."

Froaude silently looked at the figure of the fallen woman, lying on the ground.

Looking at the beautiful face of the woman. He squatted and touched her face. He turned the head of Ferris Eris a little.

The woman who should have been dead was sleeping soundly.

Froaude smiled.

Because he knew what Lucile was hiding.

The timing at which he appeared to save his sisters. The way he spoke. His expressions. Everything pointed to one thing.

He came to save his sister. But he chose to be just in time. If he were late by even one more second, his sister would have been dead for real.

But, it might have been convenient for him.

If the one who died were Iris Eris, there would have been no problem at all.

That's why he was not too late.

He.

"....."

He came here to save only Ferris.

But what was the reason?

Froaude was not sure of that. But, what was certain was that he didn't care about the life of one sister, but was exceptionally concerned for the other, which meant.....

"..... is there a need for me to let her go free.....?"

At that moment, Froaude used his hand to cover both Ferris's mouth and nose. He was uncertain what kind of power Lucile had used to put her to sleep but it seemed like her consciousness was not going to return anytime soon.

Her face only grimaced unbearably, and her fair cheeks were tinged with red.

If he continued pressing against her mouth and nose in this manner, she would quickly die without a doubt. Gazing at that, he continued.

"If she is really that important to Lucile Eris..... I should have to kill her here."

If this was the case, this might really be the great weakness of Lucile. Whatever was inside of her. Whatever that might spill out as a consequence of her being alive, might well be Lucile's weakness.

Whatever it was, Lucile certainly did not want Froaude to know.

No, if he were to kill her now, Lucile was going to appear again. From the faraway centre of Roland, even though he might be too late this time, but he would still come.

If that happened, Froaude might be killed this time.

Froaude could not kill Ferris here.

However.

“.....”

What if she was out of the country?

His power should not extend outside of the country.

Outside of the country..... if Froaude were to kill her then, what could he do?

“.....”

At that thought, Froaude stood up.

As he did so, his cheeks became wet with drops of water. He looked up into the sky. It should now be way past eight in the morning.

Nevertheless, the sun was not out. The sky was completely covered with dark clouds.

Rain, as he was about to say that, the rain drops started getting increasingly heavier.

The sky brightened as lightning flashed. The wind was strong as well. A storm was brewing.

And then Froaude,

“.....”

He looked down at Lucile's weakness lying on the ground beside him. She was getting wet from the rain and dirty from the sodden mud.

She remained unconscious even now.

Looking at that, he thought about it once more.

Now, what should I do from hereon?

"....."

It would be easy to use her as a hostage to capture Ryner Lute.

But.

Between crushing Ryner Lute, and letting Lucile Eris's weakness escape out of the country,

"Which is more important?"

But even as he asked himself that, there was no doubt in him.

Once again, he commanded the shadows with his mind. As he did that, at his feet. On the muddy ground, his shadow expanded and two beasts appeared from it.

The beasts then grabbed hold of the sleeves of both Ferris and Iris with their teeth and started dragging them across the ground.

They were bringing them to the highway. By doing that, anyone who would be passing by would see them and tend to them.

Well, with this rain, perhaps no one might be passing by, but in any case, they would regain consciousness after some time.

And then they would join up with Ryner Lute and depart from the country.

Going far away out of the reach of Lucile Eris.

"..... at a distance where I can cut open her body to see what's inside, at a place unknown to Lucile Eris."

The beasts unleashed by Froaude disappeared into the tall grass in the wilderness. And both Ferris and Iris who were dragged went out of sight as well.

The dragging sounds were gradually masked away by the sounds of the heavy rain till they were inaudible.

The sound of the rain.

At the intense sound of the rain drops hitting the ground, Froaude looked up into the sky again.

At that moment, the sky flashed again. A thundering boom was heard almost immediately. It seemed like the lightning struck somewhere close by.

And then.

"..... to embark on a journey....."

Froaude laughed, then.

"Isn't this an excellent weather for that?"

He said.

And then he looked away from the sky and looked in the direction of the highway up front.

Away from the direction of the centre of Roland, towards the direction of Imperial Nelpha and Runa Empire, beyond the

highway.

Where Ryner Lute should be waiting.

Well, since Ferris was out cold and unable to meet him anytime soon, he would probably get worried, and come running back. If he did that, he should stumble upon the Ferris and Iris who were lying on the highway.

Perhaps, he was already making his way back now.

At that thought.

“..... I should not tarry about here any longer.”

As he said that, he turned on his heel. And started trudging through the muddy wilderness.

The sky was still dark.

But he did not feel unpleasant about it.

Drenched in the heavy rain, he slowly made his way back to the heart of Roland.

Chapter 2 - The Balance Scales For Passion And Love

Approximately at around the same time.

Just north of the highway where Ferris and Iris were rolled

onto, at Asohld tea-house, was Ryner Lute.

There was yet no sign of Ferris who should have already arrived at the rendezvous location, and on top of that, it was raining, and just about the time when Ryner was starting to get worried, all of a sudden.

“..... yner.”

He heard a voice.

Which was muffled by the rain.

“..... Ryner.”

He heard it clearly this time.

His name was called.

He thought it was the voice of Ferris, who was late for the rendezvous and started,

“..... so the princess has finally arrived eh?”

From the eaves of Asohld tea-house, where he was taking shelter from the rain, he turned towards the highway.

However,

“.....”

There was no sign of Ferris.

Huh? What the? I thought I heard someone calling my name.....

As he tilted his head, once again.

“..... Ryner-tteba!”

He was called.

However, that voice was not coming from the south, but rather from the north.

“Eh?”

Ryner turned around.

And looked at the highway through the reduced visibility caused by the rain.

There was a woman standing there.

“.....”

But the woman standing there was not Ferris. As he looked closely, he knew she was clearly not her.

Firstly, her height was different. She was somewhat shorter than the tall Ferris. Her hair color was different. Ferris was blond, while she had shoulder-length red hair.

And her voice was also different from that of Ferris.

Compared to Ferris’s emotionless and monotonous voice, her voice carried a tone of intimacy and happiness.

And that voice.

For some reason, was known to Ryner.

A long time.

He had not heard that voice in a long time.

From a distant memory, that voice resided in the most peaceful part of his mind.

It was when Ryner and Sion were both seventeen. When they were students. In that memory, she was a friend and comrade. Always tagging alongside Ryner, and nagging at him.

But in the end.

In the end, she also left crying.

Even though she was originally a spy from the now already subjugated Kingdom of Estabul, she was made used by the nobles of Roland who had held her sister hostage.

And that led to her betraying her comrades, including Ryner, Sion, and a lot more others, leading to the deaths of many.

But that's not her fault. They were in a terrible era, and there was nothing much she could do.

But still she felt responsible for all that and had left the country.

That's right.

She had left the country a long time ago.

But yet, right now, she was right in front of him.

No, perhaps, she was no longer the same person as before.

Previously, her red hair was in a short cut that extended to her shoulders. Her face which still bore some childish features had now turned into a beautiful face of an adult.

But her eyes remained the same. Strong, dignified, but yet tinged with a feeling of weakness embedded somewhere within those red orbs, it was if they were completely the same as before.

She was happily looking at Ryner with those eyes. With a smiling face,

“Ryner!!”

She said with a strong, loud voice, no softer than the loud patter of the raindrops.

It really had been a long time since his name was called by her. Ryner, in response to that, with a dumbfounded voice,

“..... Kiefer.”

He spoke.

Her name.

Kiefer Knolles, the name of an old friend.

At that moment.

Her face which should have been beaming with happiness contorted before his very eyes.

Into a crying face. Even though her mouth was smiling, she had a crying face.

He could not see any tears. No, maybe she was already crying, but the tears were hidden by the falling rain, making it impossible to really tell.

Suddenly she started running. Towards here.

Ryner could not move. He could only, dumbfoundedly, look at her rushing up to him.

And then.

“.....”

Kiefer came flying towards the edge of the eaves of the tea-house.

She embraced Ryner.

Pressing against him, and pushing his back against the door of the tea-house which was not yet opened for business.

And while that was happening.

“.....”

Kiefer did not say a word. She only embraced Ryner tightly.

He looked down at the head of Keifer which suddenly came pressing into his chest.

“..... erm, ehh, um, Ki, Kiefer? Right? The real thing?”

What a thing for Ryner to ask stupidly without thinking. Given the fact that she knew Ryner, and suddenly, with a crying face, came hugging him, she had to the real thing.

But because he had not seen her for a long time ever since she had left the country, he was just stunned when she suddenly appeared and came embracing him.

Ryner looked down at the woman who was hugging him, and had a slightly troubled expression.

“Ah, erm, ah~, what should I say. Long time no see.....”

“.....”

But Kiefer did not reply. She hugged him even tighter. She buried her face into his chest.

And then.

“.....”

And Ryner just gave up on saying anything.

Looking at her with a troubled face. She was already completely drenched by the rain. The water drops in her beautiful red hair glistened. The slender body that was hugging him was surprisingly cold.

“.....”

Ryner awkwardly held her shoulders with his hands.

“..... if you stay wet like this, you’re gonna catch a cold, you know?”

He said softly.

At those words, she looked up.

She met his eyes straight on with her red eyes.

Her eyes looked dim and he knew at once that she had indeed been crying. Her face blushed slightly with embarrassment. But more than that, she happily looked up at Ryner’s face and showed him a mischievous smile.

“Ah ~, now, Ryner-tteba, while I wasn’t around, did you go after other women? You lecher.”

What a thing to say suddenly and Ryner frowned.

“It’s been a long time since we saw each other, and all of a sudden, that?”

Kiefer laughed.

“But ~. The Ryner from before wasn’t the kind who would do such a thing, geez.”

After saying that, she gently touched his hands that were around her shoulders. And then,

“Before..... in the prison, the time when I kissed Ryner..... Ryner was much more nervous.....”

Before she finished her words, Ryner withdrew his hands.

Thereafter, while shifting his eyes,

“Eh, ah, ah, er, Kiefer, to, to bring up something like that suddenly.....”

As he fumbled with his words in a flustered manner,

“Yeah, that’s it, that’s it.”

Kiefer laughed again. Following the withdrawing motion of Ryner’s hands, she stretched her hands. And grasped his hands.

Ryner was about to promptly shake them off but Kiefer, instantly,

“.....”

Instantly, made a sad-looking face, and he stopped short.

His hands were grasped. Her hands were warm. Speaking of that, his chest had become warm from her embrace and her breathing.

If that’s the case.

“.....”

If that’s the case, I’ll let it pass, Ryner thought. If he could pass on some of his warmth to her freezing body, he would let it pass, he thought.

But Kiefer just smiled, and once again buried her face into his chest, and hugged him like how a lover would.

“..... urmm.”

Ryner had a real troubled look.

In other words, erm, hm, what kind of situation is this?

Erm, erm, erm, what should I, eh, what should I do? About this?

As his mind was spinning, Kiefer said.

“You know, Ryner.”

“?”

“Erm..... do you remember..... the words I’ve said on the very last day we saw each other.”

And then.

“..... the words on the very last day we saw each other?”

Ryner started thinking back.

And remembered.

On the very last day he saw her.

Everything took place in a prison.

A double agent for Roland and Estabul, the business was settled with her being thrown into prison, and in order to save her, Ryner made a bargain with the upper echelon of the military, and exchanged his own freedom for hers.

That was something that took place three years ago.

Ryner recalled that distant memory.

That day.

That day when everything had changed.

That day when every of their comrades died on the battlefield, the day when the last remnants of peace was all gone.

That day.

When Sion was reproaching himself, and said that he would rise above. To the upper echelons of the military. He said that he would rise to the top of the country with everything he got, and change everything for the better. In order to not let any more people cry. In order to not let any more people get hurt.

True to his words, he had made that a reality. He had become the king of this country and changed everything. He was really something. But he was a fool who overworked himself sometimes.

And then on that day.

Ryner said that it was bothersome and didn't feel like doing anything. He was sick and tired of having his comrades die, as usual. He was fearful of hurting others. And thus he ran away. Going into prison, and spending his two years languidly. The only thing he did was to write that report on the Heroes' Relics. But in the end, he didn't strive to achieve anything beyond that. Because he didn't strive, that's why things had come to this. Sion weeping, and the whole country turning weird.

And additionally, on that day.

He later heard from Sion that Kiefer had left him in Sion's care and had left the country. Having resided in both Estabul and Roland, she wanted go out to see the world, and see the other countries. Ryner did not know of the thoughts and feelings she held in her heart when she left the country. But still, she left the country.

But, before that.

In the prison, just right before Ryner took the place of Kiefer in prison, they had their last conversation.

Three years ago.

Within this country, where there was a much tighter security in the prisons then, the two of them had a conversation.

Ryner looked sleepy as usual.

But Kiefer was crying. While crying, she kissed Ryner and said.

"I finally know why I have fallen in love with Ryner. I used to think that it was because there was no need for me to have my guard up against someone that unmotivated..... and that I could always feel at ease around you..... but it wasn't like that. Because Ryner is really kind. And strong. That's why..... that's why you are no monster. I guarantee that. If you call yourself a monster again, I won't forgive you."

He remembered those words of hers.

"....."

Ryner frowned again.

She had held out her outstretched hands towards Ryner again.

The same kind of outstretched hands from Sion and Ferris, towards him.

Even though he had thought of himself as a killing machine, a monster who had no right to love another, and had continued running away, she had told this monster that she loved him.

But still, even with that, Ryner ran away. He had continued running away during those three years.

And it was not until he was too late for anything and everything that he realized it.

Sion had become weird. The country had become weird. Ferris crying. Kiefer crying. Milk crying. Tyle, Toni, Fahl, Byor, Lafra, Pueka, all died.

Only when he was too late for anything and everything then he realized.

Everyone had stretched their hands to me and I didn't manage to take hold of any one of them.

The last day they met.

Even though when Kiefer had already told him that.

"Ryner is not a monster. At the very least, in my eyes, you aren't one."

And then Ryner.

"....."

The Ryner now still did not see it that way however. He still thought of himself as a monster, a dangerous existence who may hurt people, even now he was afraid of all that however, he no longer thought of running away.

He won't run away again, he thought.

Therefore, Ryner,

"..... ah, I remembered of course. Kiefer told me I'm not a monster....."

But he was interrupted and with a sparkling smile, she looked up at him,

"I said that I like Ryner, did you remember that properly!?"

She said.

And Ryner,

"Huh, it was about that!?"

Instantly, her face turned red.

"Eh? Eh? What do you mean by 'it was about that'!"

"Erm, ah, ah ~ ..... no..... ah, that, you know? That Kiefer like me as a friend..... right....."

But, Ryner could not continue.

Since Kiefer's eyes started to blur as she looked straight at him.

Into Ryner's eyes.

Looking straight into the eyes bearing the abominable curse called **Alpha Stigma**.

Ryner, without thinking, seemed to want to turned his face away. Since he could not bear it when people gazed into his eyes.

When people peeked into the eyes bore by the monster, by himself. He felt ill at ease every time when people peeked into his killer eyes.

But she should already be well aware of it.

Since he had gone berserk right before her.

Because he couldn't stop his eyes from going berserk, he had killed lots of people around him.

Not only did he kill all of the mage knights of the Kingdom of Estabul, he almost killed his friends, Sion and Kiefer.

He was a monster.

A cursed monster.

He had no right to accept the love of another.

He had no right to be loved by another.

Even though he should be well aware of that.

Even though she should be well aware of that.

She still looked straight at them.

Ryner's eyes.

Cursed eyes.

The creepy eyes where the vermillion pentacles floated above.

"....."

With eyes filled with love, she looked intently at him.

And Ryner.

“.....”

“.....”

But, at that moment, suddenly.

“.....
kuuu

And furthermore, that was a familiar voice.

An adorable, clear voice.

He could immediately recognize it to be the voice of the younger of sister of that crazy, troublesome, dango demon.

Ryner looked towards the direction of the voice.

In the heavy rain.

Stood a young girl.

With blond hair, and extraordinary perfect features on her face. Wearing a dress with lots of frills, and both her back and her hands were laden with a number of knapsacks.

It was Iris Eris, younger sister of Ferris Eris. She was around ten years of age? Wait, she should be twelve now, right?

Well, it did not matter now anyway.

That Iris was looking this way.

“Beast-kun!!”

She called out again.

And then Kiefer,

“Beast-kun?”

She looked here with an incredulous expression.

And then Ryner,

“.....”

Did not reply.

By the way, regarding the nickname ‘Beast-kun’, it was given by Ferris who told Iris, *At night, in order to assault girls, Ryner will transform into a beast and wander around the streets!*. And since then, Iris had always called him that. Well, it would be troublesome to explain all this so he ignored that for now.

Ryner strained his eyes to look at Iris through the low visibility caused by the rain.

As he did that, he could somewhat make out her face.

“..... what is it?”

Ryner muttered reflexively.

The Iris who was always energetic, and making trouble for him, now had a face contorting as if she was about to cry.

At that moment, Kiefer asked.

“..... an acquaintance?”

Ryner nodded.

“The younger sister of my partner.”

“..... partner?”

“Yeah.”

After giving an appropriate reply, he again looked at Iris. But, it was evident that there was something strange with how she was behaving.

With her feet, she should be able to reach this tea-house in just mere seconds.

But yet, she did not seem to be bent on making a move.

And furthermore, she was facing the other side, with her back facing here, appearing to be dragging something heavy across the ground.

But he did not know what that was. The rain was extremely heavy, and he couldn't really make out what was at her feet.....

"....."

At that moment.

Iris propped something up from the ground.

What was propped up had the same blond hair as her, a face of similar features as her, the face of a peerless beauty.

With long bond hair that was completely drenched, fair skin, and a flawless face.

But those eyes on that face were shut. And the face looked pale as well.

Looking unconscious.

Or was it because.

She's dead?

"..... Ferris!?"

Ryner shouted and sprinted forward.

"Ah."

Kiefer exclaimed in surprise but this was not the time to pay attention to that.

It was clear that something bad had happened.

Iris looked as she was about to cry.

And that monster-like, willful, bothersome, one who should possess the strength to become a mighty foe against any opponent, that Ferris was lying on the ground.

It was clearly an abnormal situation.

Ryner ran with all his might. Closing in towards the place where Ferris was lying, at an insane speed.

The nearer he got, the more evident it was that the situation was bad. Iris had dragged Ferris through the rain all the way up till here.

Both of them were drenched and covered in mud, looking pathetic.

As Ryner reached their side, he said.

“What in the world..... what in the world has happened?”

Iris, while weeping,

“Ne, Nee-sama..... Nee-sama was killed.....”

“Wha!”

Instantly, Ryner’s heart seemed to stop.

Killed?

Ferris?

Ferris was killed..... then Ferris is already.....

“.....”

Ryner placed a finger to her neck, and from that, even though

Ferris felt cold from the rain, he could still sense a body temperature and a clear pulse.

Then, Ryner looked at Iris,

“She’s alive, you know?”

As Iris was sobbing up her tears, she nodded a few times.

“She, she, she died but then came back to life.”

To those words,

“Huh? She died but came back to life?”

“Un.”

“Huh, ah ~. What do you mean by that?”

As Ryner asked with a questioning look, Kiefer caught up to him.

“Now Ryner-tteba, you were so fast.....”

But Ryner did not answer.

She then looked at the unconscious Ferris, where Ryner had placed a finger to her neck, and turned serious.

“..... is she dead?”

Ryner shook his head.

“No, she still has a pulse.”

“Her temperature?”

“A little cold, but there’s no problem.”

“But, if she continues to stay in this rain.....”

“Ah, ah, you’re right.”

“Let’s move her.”

On saying that, Kiefer carried the legs of Ferris.

And Ryner as well,

“Yeah.”

He acknowledged, and carried her head and body. And with that, they back-tracked from where they came from.

And as they reached the edge of the eaves again, Kiefer started knocking on the door of the tea-house.

“Excuse me. There’s someone injured, can you let us in?”

She called out.

Ryner could only act dumbfounded at Kiefer’s sensibility.

In a way, he was fed up with himself for being useless.

He was again stunned into inaction.

After seeing Iris cry, and hearing about Ferris being killed, he was very much stunned.

But there was really no time to be dawdling around.

Due to too many things happening just recently, he had almost forgotten that both he and Ferris were Roland’s fugitives right now, and they were being pursued by the military.

It was possible that Ferris might have been done in by those pursuers. No, it’s not a possibility, that had to be the case.

Those pursuers could just be nearby.

They were actually able to render Ferris to such a state. The pursuers this time might be tough opponents who were

nothing like what they've seen till now.

There was really no time to be dawdling around.

"Geez, get a hold of yourself."

Ryner said to himself and breathed out softly.

At that moment, the owner of the tea-house came out. A person Ryner also knew by face, the bearded Oyaji of this establishment.

As Oyaji looked at Ferris,

"Ferris-chan!? What in the world....."

And Kiefer,

"She seemed to have fainted. And because it's raining outside, can we bring her inside to rest?"

"Of, of, of course. Come, please come in quickly."

And then Kiefer turned her head around. After Ryner acknowledged her gesture,

"Kiefer."

"Uhn."

"For now, I'll....."

But before Ryner could finish what he wanted to say,

"Got it."

Kiefer nodded. After that, she took hold of Ferris and entered the tea-house.

Ryner who was about to speak, but in the end was able to send his communication across to her without the further need for words.

“.....”

Ryner smiled wryly.

Of course, and again he recalled the past.

Kiefer, she is excellent.

Even in that Roland Empire Royal Military Special Academy, she was seen as excellent, and on top of that, she was highly popular, and thanks to that, because she was often seen with him, he was even more hated by the rest.

But that was convenient. Since he didn’t like to mingle with other people, thanks to her, he was hated by all the rest, which made it easy for him.

No, perhaps she was the same as well. As a spy, she had to keep on deceiving others, but perhaps she did not really have the strength in her to bear with her own hypocritical front, that’s why she chose to stay beside the most hated dunce of the academy.

And the both of them started living a life where others could not get close.

Then Sion came along.

To make Kiefer and Ryner his comrades, the Sion who was the top of the academy came to scout for them.

Ryner recalled the scenes from the past academy days.

As he recalled the days he spent with Kiefer, the first time he met that disagreeable Sion acting like an honors student,

Ryner smiled.

Then, he turned around.

He tensed up his whole body and cast his consciousness around him.

To ascertain the presence of any enemy in their surroundings. To ascertain the nearby presence of whoever had caused Ferris to be in that state.

However, even when he strained his ears, he could not sense the presence of any enemy. Perhaps the enemy might already be right beside him, but all he could hear was the loud pattering sounds of the rain.

Every other sound was masked by the sounds of the heavy downpour, and he could hear nothing else.

But still, even so.

“..... can’t sense any killing intent.”

But still, that might not be necessarily accurate.

Since the enemy was someone who could defeat Ferris. To erase his presence completely from detection should be easy for this fella.

“.....”

Ryner took a step into the rain.

But there was no reaction, no sign of any enemy.

“Anyone there?”

“.....”

“If you are there, making a response will make my life easier, you know.”

But to Ryner’s words,

“.....”

There was no response from any possible enemy at all.

“None I suppose, HERE!”

Ryner tried using a much louder voice, and as expected, there was no reaction at all.

However, it did seem like there was no enemy in the nearby surroundings.

So as to speak, if there were any enemies at all, during the time when Ryner was still unaware of whether Ferris was still alive, at the point where he was in a stunned state incapable of making correct judgements, that would be the best time attack him.

That was the time when he was utterly defenseless.

Which meant,

“..... then, there..... aren’t any pursuers after all?”

Who did that to Ferris?

Could it be that she was in that state because of something else?

Well, regarding that, everything would become clear if he asked Iris after stopping her crying.

“..... it’s hard to make head or tail from Iris’s conversations though.....”

As Ryner said that wearily, he released the tension in his body. And he turned round his heel again.

And started walking towards the tea-house where Ferris, Iris, and Kiefer were in.

And then he,

“Perhaps I should wait until Ferris regains consciousness.....”

Then, in response to his own words, in a dejected tone,

“No, it might be even harder to get any proper information out of the elder sister.....”

While saying that in a groaning tone, Ryner smiled.

In any case, there were more than a mountain of urgent things to do. He couldn’t relax yet, for now, he would wake Ferris up and find out what had happened. Um, but then after that, regarding Kiefer.....

“.....”

At that moment, Ryner’s thoughts halted.

Even though for now, there were already more than a mountain of urgent things to do, but he just remembered that what just came up a while ago was at another level of urgent humongous matter.

Those biting red eyes of Kiefer.

He remembered those eyes of hers that were looking straight at Ryner.

“..... u~mm.”

He tried shaking his head perplexedly but, his unkempt black

hair, which was a result of his sleepy-headedness, was now thoroughly wet from the rain.

Ryner then,

“..... ah ~, it’s a little troublesome now that I’m leaving the country, but maybe I should cut my hair.”

What a thing to say when grooming had always been troublesome for him, but he tried saying that as a habitual practice of running away from reality.

Then, once again, he looked at the tea-house where Kiefer and Ferris were.

“..... sigh.”

After making a small sigh, he again started walking towards the tea-house.

It was a sudden thing.

Suddenly, anything and everything about the world had changed.

It was really sudden. But it’s because that it was so sudden that during all this while, people were taking things easy, and that no one seemed to have realized it.

No, even now, there were still a lot of people who had yet to realize it, wasn’t it so?

The wildly enthusiastic populace.

The joyful people.

The landscape of this place, Roland Empire, seemed to have completely changed, it was now surrounded by fiery emotions.

With an overwhelming amount of charisma, the perfect king, Sion Astal, had started proclaiming about dominating the world.

First, raze Nelpha, then where next?

Runa?

Cassla?

Let’s show everyone the might of Roland.

Let’s show everyone the might of the Hero King, Sion Astal.

“.....”

Just recently, the people of this country should have been living happily in peace.

Purging the nobles, shrinking the scale of the army, redistributing the newly acquired wealth back to the people, they should have been living happily.

Everyone should have been happy with the newly acquired stability.

All of a sudden.

It was really all of a sudden, that the landscape of this country had changed.

Since they were bestowed with a peaceful country from the kind and gentle king, they shall be guided by the king to become a militaristic nation.

Turning into a smiling country that destroys other countries.

“.....”

That’s right.

The peace which was thought to be everlasting, was starting to break down.

But she was not surprised by this.

Because she thought that this would happen.

A country that has everlasting peace.

A country where everyone can live with a smile on their faces.

Where no one cries.

Where no one gets hurt.

A truly perfect world.

Perfect world.

But that was.

That was way too perfect.

It was at the level of perfection where everything would crumble with only a touch.

“.....”

And it did.

Even though it was certain that no one had touched it, it crumbled.

It was a crumpling landscape.

“.....”

Milk Callaud was gazing with knitted eyebrows.

With soft flaxen hair, despite being at the age of seventeen, she still retained some child-like features on her face, as well as in her large eyes. Wearing Roland’s military uniform over her slender body.

Stretching the back muscles of her tiny body, she strained her eyes to see as far as possible, across the landscape before her.

By the way, she was now on the rooftop of a building that was covered in a pitch-black colour.

On the rooftop of the official residence of the **Taboo Breaker** Pursuit Squad of the Roland Empire.

This official residence was originally a water tower built from a high tower, and she was now on top of that, and even with her short height, she could gaze at almost the entire landscape of this country, she felt.

She could see everything, she felt.

That’s why from the top of that water tower.

“.....”

Milk gazed intently at the face of this country.

Today’s wind was strong, and her hair fluttered in the wind.

Even though it was already eight in the morning, the sky was still dark.

Perhaps it would rain today.

She looked up into the sky, then let her sight fall a little.

The streets below Roland's castle filled a large expanse of land before her, and further from there were flat plains, hill stretches, making up the entire landscape.

The landscape before her had changed completely through the years gone by.

The flat plains were decreasing, the cities were expanding, and flood control was progressing.

This country, had gradually, gradually become boisterous.

To the point where one would simply have forgotten about the former mad Roland.

The former Roland that was tyrannized by the mad king and the mad nobles.

Sion Astal was the one who changed that country in one breath.

The people who were now living in the large cities were full of smiles, full of hope, full of expectations of the Hero King.

If he was the perfect, flawless Hero King, he would create an excellent place for all to live in.

If they just pin their hopes on the perfect Hero King, things could only get better.

Now, let's follow the Hero King.

Now, let's move forward along with the Hero King.

Now, let's, together with the Hero King, exterminate the people of the other countries, and take everything away from them.

There was no need to think about anything.

Because the Hero King would not make a mistake.

“..... even though that could not have been possible.”

Milk murmured while gazing at the streets.

She knew of it.

The king’s weakness.

Sion Astal’s weakness.

Even though she had only met him a few times, but still, Milk felt that she could see his weakness.

With a kind, gentle, smiling face, and regal eyes.

A king so perfect with no opening.

However, because he was too perfect, that’s where he was fragile.

Even though people could not possibly live alone, but yet, he took on everything alone upon himself.

And hiding himself in a place where no one could see him, screaming silently in anguish.

Lonely.

Please help me.

Someone, someone, please look at me.

Milk knew how painful that was.

Milk knew that people were not supposed to live alone.

That’s because Milk had already died once.

In that orphanage, she was not loved by anyone in this world, and by the time she realized that she was alone, her heart had already died once.

But Ryner brought her back.

Ryner told her not to die.

Ryner looked at her with that tired-looking, troubled-looking, but kind-looking black eyes.

He gave her the reason she was searching for to live.

That’s why.

That’s why she had stayed alive until this point.

And as long as she remained alive, one day.

One day..... she would be able to meet up with him, with Ryner, and thanked him for that.

“.....”

At that moment, she knitted her eyebrows unexepectedly.

Because she recalled something unpleasant.

After searching for so long, and finally she was able to reunite with him, but beside him, always with him, was an extraordinary beautiful blond hair woman, she recalled.

And that person made Ryner smile. Milk had never seen him smile so happily before.

And then.

“.....”

She felt a little lonely.

The place which she had always wanted to be in, an agreement which she had made previously, was taken by someone else.

Of course she was happy that Ryner was able to smile.

In the past..... in that orphanage, Ryner would never have smiled in that manner.

Known as the genius killing machine.

He bore deep wounds within, and carried an expression that seemed to have given up on anything and everything.

A face that seemed to find everything a bother, a face that was on the verge of tears.

Milk couldn’t make that Ryner smile.

But now, he was smiling happily.

The one who managed that was not herself.

Regarding that, it was a little.

A little.

“..... uu~, even though I tried not to think about it at all.”

She clutched her chest and smiled. She took in a breath and tell her weak self *don’t*! As she reprimanded herself, she put on a smiling face.

But as expected, her tears were about to flow out.

But *it can't be helped*, she thought. The fact that her tears were forming couldn't be helped, she thought.

She had always dreamt of meeting him again, always, always.

For a long, long time.

For a hard-bearing, sad, lonely time, she had wondered what should she do when she see him again. What should she say? What kind of face should she show him? *Do you still remember me?*, she would say. Firstly, she probably ought to thank him. *It was thanks to you that I have stayed alive up till now*, that's how she would thank him. *And also, and also, do you remember my last words?* She would say. *Ah, that was of course something I said while we were still kids, and it might not mean anything at all. But, but, I've always thought if that were to happen, how wonderful it would be*, she would say. *That was..... if we were to stay alive and meet again, after giving my thanks, would you take me as your bride, I was wondering*, she would say..... *then again, how can these words come from myself ~ ahh now, I probably won't be able to say it when I do get to meet him. Even expressing my gratitude is embarrassing enough, perhaps I won't be able to say it in the end. But, but if I can meet him again.*

If she just stayed alive, and be able to meet him once more.....

"....."

On a painful night.

On a sorrowful night.

Hugging her pillow, always thinking of such things.

All those things she had thought about,

“..... they didn’t go well though.....”

She murmured, and while somewhat on the verge of tears, she smiled.

Finally on the day she met him.

In the end, Milk was in a state of surprise, her mind blank, and none of what she had imagined came to pass.

She didn’t say her thanks.

Though she was frequently mulling regretfully over that, but the fact that Ryner was living and smiling was something she was truly happy about.

Even though it was not because of her but someone else.

If Ryner.

Towards that girl.

“.....”

Even if Ryner likes that girl..... since I like Ryner, as long as Ryner is able to smile like that, I’ll be happy enough.

At that moment, it was more than what she could bear, and her tears just overflowed from her eyes.

“Ah, ah, no, my, my tears just came out! But, but that was true, you know? I’m really happy that Ryner is able to smile like that, you know?”

Somehow, she was trying to explain herself to the empty air.

Of course, there was no reply from the empty air.

And then Milk smiled.

She was laughing at her idiotic behaviour.

And then.

“And also.....”

She murmured.

“And also, now, I’m no longer.....”

Now, she was no longer alone. After Ryner told her to live, and she did her best to do that, even though there were many unpleasant things that happened. No no. Even though there might be a lot more unpleasant things. But, there were also many teary, joyful moments that just washed those unpleasant stuff away.

Meeting Luke. Meeting Lear. Meeting Lach. Meeting Moe. Seeing Major Miller’s grim, angry face.

And everyone said that they would become her family.

She often recalled those words that Luke had said to her.

All of us like you, and became your subordinates. We are together with you because we like you. That’s why we want you to get back what you’ve lost, and we want you to attain happiness. We are not fighting for the country. We are fighting for people. The people precious to us, before our eyes, as much as possible, we want to save them.....”

And Milk also thought the same way.

Because she like Luke and the rest, that’s why she stayed together with them.

It would also be great if she could help them get back what was lost, she thought.

Not fighting for the country.

For Luke and the rest. To protect her family, she fought.

The important people before her eyes, she's fighting to save many, even if she's doing it by herself.

But.

But because she's no longer alone.

Even when the night was dark, she wasn't lonely.

Therefore.

"....."

Therefore, even if Ryner did not turn around, towards her.....

"....."

At that moment,

"..... captain."

Someone called her.

"Captain Milk."

Milk did not turn around. No, she just couldn't turn around for now. Since her tears were flowing. If she were to be seen in this manner, she would just cause worry to the rest.

That's why she franctically wipe her tears with her hands.

Of course, if she did that, it would obvious to others what kind of state she was in right then.

But, she wiped her tears. Then she practiced smiling once

towards the empty space, and turned around.

Below the water tower were her subordinates.

Standing there were her family.

Luke Stokkart.

Lear Rinkal.

Lach Velariore.

Moe Velariore.

She looked at her friends and smiled.

As she did that, Moe looked up at her.

“Well, we were thinking where have you been, and it appears that you have climbed to someplace pretty high up!!”

He said it with such an envious face that Milk had to smile.

“This is my special seat.”

Then Moe, with a seemingly lonely face,

“Ehh, then does it mean that I’m not allowed up there?”

“It’s ok!”

“Really!?”

“It’s ok!! Only specially for Moe!”

“Yay!”

As that kind of conversation unfolded, the Lach standing next to him said,

“Ehhhhhhhh, only Moe, what about me, what about me?”

“Of course it’s also ok for Lach!! But Major Miller’s face is scary, so not for him ~”

Everyone laughed at her words.

Then Lear looked up into the sky,

“..... now, captain. Isn’t it about time to get down from there? I think it’s about to rain soon.”

On hearing that, Milk looked up into the sky again. Indeed, from the looks of the sky, it seemed like a storm was brewing and rain would descend upon them very soon.

“..... if it rains, it will be dangerous up there.”

But Milk just smiled at those words.

“But, for just a little longer.”

She wanted to stay here for just a little longer, she thought.

As she said that, the tallest of them all, the eldest of them all --- well even though that was being said, he was merely twenty-six years of age --- Luke nodded,

“Then, perhaps I alone, should come join you for a little while.”

After saying that, he scrambled up the water tower.

And stood beside her.

Along the vertical height of the water tower, right at the top, there was merely a small amount of space, and it was a narrow fit for the two of them.

As Luke stood beside her, he began,

“..... what was captain gazing at?”

On hearing that, Milk turned her gaze to where she was facing.

And Milk said,

“..... the streets.”

“Hm.”

“And the future of this country.”

“I see.”

Luke nodded and squinted his eyes. Always in a calm manner, a gentle person, as if he was a guardian at a nursery school, but in truth he has a very intelligent mind, which Milk knew about.

No, the Lach and Moe who were acting like kids just now, as well as the cool collected Lear, aside from the kind faces they put on, they have another true side to them, and Milk was aware of these.

Each of them was better than Milk, and that’s why they could see far into the future.

That’s why even though there should have been no real need for them to ask Milk, but still, Luke, with a kind voice, faced her and asked.

“And what did captain see?”

And then, Milk shook her head.

“..... no no. I couldn’t see anything. But there are lot of things I must do.....”

“You can see them?”

“Yes.”

Luke smiled at her acknowledgement.

“..... since most people can’t see the things they must do. And for you to be able to see them clearly, as expected, captain is great.”

And then Milk smiled and looked at Luke.

As always, he had that kind, gentle face.

As she looked at that face, she puffed up her cheeks and said.

“Now, Luke and the rest of you guys shouldn’t flatter me so much.”

But Luke shrugged his shoulders.

“It’s not flattery. It’s the truth.”

“That’s straaannggee. I’m already well aware of the fact that Luke is way smarter than me, and way stronger than me. In fact, I should become the subordinate of Luke and the rest instead.....”

At that moment, Luke interrupted her.

“No, the truth is..... we are really proud to have become your subordinates. Because just by you being here, we are all able to smile. Even though you should have had a lot of harsh experiences in your life, but you still smile bravely, and only think of others.....”

“But, but it’s the same for everyone of you.....”

But Luke shook his head,

“It’s not the same at all. Our hands..... our hands, beyond what you think, have long been stained. Stained so much that we could not see a future ahead of us.”

He said.

And then he looked intently at his hands. Slim, long fingers. Both white palms.

Even though they were evidently clean, but Luke’s eyes were seeing something else altogether.

It felt like he was looking at the lives that he had taken.

The warmth of the blood.

In any case, when Milk saw the expression that Luke had then, which was different from usual, she was lost for words.

He was carrying a deep sorrow.

But.

“.....”

He looked at her again with a kind smile.

“..... but, it would be wonderful if I can dream about that again, that’s what I thought whenever I looked at you, captain. If I can make you smile. My family..... if I can protect my new family, I can once again, with these stained hands, chase after the light, and that would be a wonderful dream to see..... that’s what I can think about again. Not just myself. Lear, Lach, Moe as well, they all should be thinking the same thing. Our true strengths don’t matter at all..... there’s none who are not satisfied with being your subordinate.”

Luke said that.

And Milk,

“.....”

She only smiled.

Since there was nothing more she could say.

Although.

Although I feel the same way.

A new-found family. In order to protect that and her new comrades, she had to try doing her best once more, she had to try staying alive once more, and that’s what she thought.

She who should have already died once, was brought back to life by Ryner.

And now she was supported by everyone.

That’s why she was no longer completely alone.

No longer lonely. No longer sad.

Now that she was surrounded by so many important things, to the point where it had become dazzling to her.

That’s why.

That’s why she said.

“..... then, I shall remain as captain, is that fine?”

As she said that, Luke, with a slightly sad smile, nodded.

That was a formality.

To her, that was an important formality.

It was a formality to acknowledge that their relationship with one another was beyond that of a commander-subordinate relationship.

Then, she turned her eyes away and once again looked at the streets below the castle.

And faced that direction.

She turned her eyes towards the direction of the highway running northwards.

“..... it seems like Ryner managed to leave the country?”

Luke nodded.

“Yes. As you’ve commanded, I’ve lent him a hand by handing him those assembled information documenting the status of this country. Whether everything goes well or not, the rest will be up to him.....”

But he was interrupted by Milk who said.

“If it’s Ryner, everything will definitely turn out well. Because he is.....”

He is someone I like, a genius different from me.

But she swallowed those words before finishing.

Luke looked at the side of her face with a worried expression,

“..... is it really okay not to go along with him.....?”

As he asked her, once again, she smiled with a face that was

on the verge of tears, and did not answer.

“.....”

That.

Even though I really want to go along, but, it’s sad to admit this but, that is her job.

Just recently, she had heard about the darkness of this country from Luke.

She had heard about what Luke and the rest had been doing up till now, what they had been thinking of.

She had heard about the darkness that Sion Astal was shrouded in.

She had heard about the darkness that Ryner was shouldering.

They were things that she could not have imagined, terrible, dark, lonely things.

She was being protected and sheltered, knowing nothing, while everyone was bearing all those painful things, she was always smiling.

But, finally, she had come to the same place.

“.....”

That’s right, while gazing down at the streets below the castle, she thought.

Finally, she was able to shoulder the same things as the rest of them.

That’s right, she thought.

And then she pondered.

With her small head, she pondered with everything she got.

About everybody's happiness.

About her own happiness.

About the direction of this country.

It was the first time she pondered so seriously.

And the conclusion.

".....".

The conclusion was that she's going to give up on Ryner.

Ryner had things to accomplish outside of the country. But she could not go along with him.

Because, there were also things to accomplish within this country.

Because she had a family here.

Because there were things she had to protect in this country.

".....".

And all that would also one day help save Ryner, she thought.

Whatever that Ryner had left behind in this country, she would protect them and that would definitely be of assistance to him, she thought.

Then, everything was fine as it was, wasn't it so, she.....

".....".

She asked herself.

At the end of that highway, right now, Ryner was about to leave the country.

And beside her, was that beautiful woman.

“.....”

But, even so, everything was fine as it was, wasn’t it so, she thought.

Perhaps, her dream was already fulfilled, but, and, if everything went well with Ryner, if he was able to smile, everything was fine as it was, wasn’t it so, she thought.

“..... Luke.”

She said softly.

However, this excellent subordinate of hers seemed to know what she wanted to say.

He patted Milk’s head and held her to his chest.

In the midst of that, her tears flowed out again.

She really wanted to go along with Ryner.

Because that was really her dream.

If she could reunite with him once more. If she could meet him again, she wanted to become his bride and remain by his side. To do her best to make him smile, to live her days with him, it had always been her dream.

At that moment, Luke said.

“..... if it’s so painful, it’s alright to go after him.”

But, Milk just shook her head vigorously. As a result, the chest area of Luke's clothes were smeared with her tears and mucus, which was something that could not be helped.

She only shook her head.

"..... I shall remain in this country."

"....."

"Because. Because, right here where I am, there are so many people important to me."

"....."

"And also..... and also..... one day, when Ryner returns..... if there are no friends here waiting for him, it's going to be lonely....."

"....."

"That's why I'm going to do my best here. Even though I can't be right beside Ryner..... but I'm sure this is the best way I can be of help to him....."

"....."

Luke did not say anything.

Milk also did not say any more.

And after that, no one knew how much time had passed. She cried for a while. Luke's clothes were completely dirtied.

And after that, she looked up.

"....."

As expected, Luke was making a kind, gentle face.

Milk smiled.

“..... somehow, I’ve done something embarrassing.”

And Luke said,

“Because we’re family.”

“..... uhn.”

Milk nodded meekly.

That one word was enough.

For not changing her decision to stay in this country. For not changing her decision to not go after Ryner. That one word was enough, to affirm that her decision was the right one, she thought.

And then,

“Ah ~, I messed up Luke’s clothes.”

She said in a joking tone.

As she said that, Luke looked down at the chest area of his clothes.

“Ah, really. I have to ask Major Miller to grant me another set of uniform.”

“I’ll wash it.”

“Really? Ah, but, Lear is really good at laundry though.”

At Luke’s words, from below the water tower,

“You said that with the intention to push all the laundry to me, isn’t it so?”

As a voice cried out, Milk looked down.

As expected, all her family members were right below.

It was as if they were all waiting for her return, that was what their expressions were showing.

And then Milk smiled.

Her decision was the right one, she thought.

Then.

“.....”

She shifted her eyes from the streets below the castle to somewhere else.

Towards the core of this country.

She was looking at a higher --- a building much higher than this water tower, within this country.

Roland’s castle.

A place where the Hero King Sion Astal resided in.

That was the reason why she was going to remain here.

The Roland Empire which had undergone a transformation at an alarming rate.

It was now a country of overwhelming military might, and not only had it given an order to kill off surrendering soldiers in Nelpha, but also massacring escaping women and children.

It was a country protected by monstrous soldiers with abnormal fighting capabilities, a result of completed mad human experiments.

In order to remain near the center of that, which had also undergone a sudden transformation, the Hero King Sion Astal.

“.....”

In order to monitor that overly perfect, and consequently fragile, mad king,

“.....”

At that moment, she jumped off from the water tower.

Even though the water tower was pretty tall, it was not a big deal to her.

Gripping the rails and using them as a pivot, she flung herself over, and landed lightly on her feet.

As she landed, beside her, was Lear handing her a new set of clothes.

That was, so as to speak, a full set of uniform.

In the military, there was a set of ceremonial uniform used for meeting the nobles and the royal family, and that was one of those.

She took them from him.

At that moment, Luke also leaped down.

“Well?”

He asked.

She nodded.

Once again, she looked up.

Towards the center of Roland.

At the crown of the castle.

She did not know what was happening inside now. It seemed like Major Miller was now having an audience with Sion Astal, and that he was being informed about the details regarding Sion's transformation, as well as what was going to happen from hereon, but still, quite possibly, it would not translate to a complete comprehension of everything.

She did not think that Sion Astal would reveal everything.

Perhaps, she could not reject that there was actually a possibility that Sion Astal was merely manipulated by something else.

That would mean that this country now was in a terrible state of instability.

That's why she needed to remain here.

That's why she.....

"..... well, let's go, shall we?"

And she started walking.

In order to find the source of the darkness plaguing this country.

In order to catch hold of the darkness plaguing this country.

And the rampage of this country

"Let's go..... and meet the Hero King Sion Astal-sama."

In order to stop the rampage of this country, to be of some help to Ryner who had embarked on a journey.

Chapter 3 - The Balance Scales For The Goddesses And The Hero

She is really a beautiful woman, Kiefer thought.

It was in a room on the second floor of the tea-house.

As she looked at the sleeping, blond-hair beauty lying on the bed, she wanted to sigh out but then decided against it.

Speaking about the brief explanation that she had received, her name was apparently Ferris Eris.

During the time that Kiefer left the country in search of a way to remove the curse of **Alpha Stigma** from Ryner, it was Sion who made her the partner of Ryner.

It seemed like these two had been travelling together in company for the entire past year.

The two of them had been journeying to search for **Rule Fragment**..... rather, Heroes' Relics according to Ryner's report.

Only the two of them.

Only the two of them.....

“..... travelling together huh.”

She muttered softly.

“Hn?”

Ryner looked up and looked towards here. He was sitting on a chair beside the bed of the sleeping Ferris. And was looking worriedly at her (Ferris).

At any rate.

“.....”

At any rate, she was not going to be jealous.

Because, she was very much well aware that he would be kind to anyone else, and additionally, she couldn’t see any particular special feelings displayed towards her (Ferris).

And besides, besides.

Un, erm, ah ~.

“.....”

Uu ~.

Right. I’m sorry. It’s really jealousy.

Kiefer groaned in such a manner within the depths of her heart all by herself.

Ah ~ now, what the heck is this. I’ve being doing my best wholeheartedly since leaving the country, Ryner-tteba. Ryner-tteba!!

What was I trying to accomplish by keeping it a secret.....

“.....”

At that moment, once again, she was about to sigh out in frustration, but gave up.

Because it couldn’t be helped.

Because she was someone who had betrayed Ryner and the rest, someone who had left the country. Besides, in the end, even though she kissed him and confessed her love to him, she had yet to hear a reply from him.

Thus.

Thus, this was not something unheard of right ~ it couldn’t be helped right ~ but even so I can’t acceptttttttttt itttttttttttt!

In the end, not being able to accept it, her heart was in a state of turmoil.

“.....”

Then, Kiefer looked intently at the sleeping Ferris.

She was really extraordinary beautiful, as far as one could see.

How could she win?

Kiefer felt dejected just thinking about all this.

She tried finding her own reflection in the mirror at the corner of the room, then looked at herself. She thought that she had become more womanly than before, growing her red hair to shoulder length, and bearing pretty well-arranged features. Not bad, she thought. Probably. Then again, she had that supreme ruler from the northern part of the continent falling for

her. Surely, yes, even though she wouldn't know it herself, surely there was no problem with her looks, she thought.....

At that moment.

Kiefer, once again, looked at that thing on the bed that couldn't possibly be a human.

She had soft silky skin, fair and smooth like porcelain, and fine, soft, golden hair.

Looks like a woman..... and it's not just about the curves; her height, slender body, delicateness which every man would want to protect, a nice body with a great style.

It was as if she came out of a fairy tale.

"..... like a princess."

She murmured without thinking.

On hearing that, Ryner smiled wryly.

"No, no, you are tricked by what you see, you need to experience it for yourself. She truly is a demon down to the core."

As he used a familiar manner to talk about her, Kiefer felt like crying.

Uwaan ~. She was on the verge of tears, but Ryner failed to notice that.

She looked at Ryner.

He had that usual sleepy, languid face, and had that look that seemed to be ignorant of the inner workings of the love relationship between a man and a woman.

“..... sigh.”

This time, she actually sighed out.

“Ah, Kiefer should be feeling tired, it’s okay to go sleep, you know? I’ll be looking after her.”

Duh, that would be the last thing I want.

Instead of crying that out, she held back and smiled.

“..... it’s alright. It’s been a while since I saw Ryner, and my tiredness had all flown away.”

She said gritting her teeth as she smiled.

As she said that, her face seemed about to turn red, but she managed to stop her flush somehow.

Furthermore, she wanted to demonstrate that she had become a woman who was able to respond with such words, that’s why she made an effort.

Besides, besides, the lines she just said were her true feelings. They weren’t made up at all.

Even though this was the first meeting in three years, her feelings had not changed at all. That was what she was certain of.

Looking at his face. Looking at his sleepy eyes. Looking at his unkempt hair. Looking at his languid lean body. Looking at his awkward behaviour.

She looked at his kind-looking face in spite of all that.

Ah, as she expected.

She thought.

As I've thought, I'm still in love with Ryner, she realized.

But then.

"....."

Ryner still had that slight withdrawn expression.

It was the same as previously.

When Kiefer had expressed her interest in the past, he had that same face.

And she knew the reason behind it.

She knew what was embedded within his heart.

He thought of himself as a monster. He thought of himself as a cursed monster that could not take hold of anyone's hand.

Even though he is actually a kind-hearted person. Even though he has saved many with his hands.

If I am killed by you, or shattered by you, that will still be fine, that was something she couldn't tell him.

On just a touch, you will be shattered, he would think, *you will be killed*, he would think, fearfully.

It was as before, currently, his heart was surrounded by a sturdy armour.

Taken by a deep curse.

She knew that immediately when she saw him again.

That was why she went on a journey.

In order to break his curse.

In order to break his **Alpha Stigma** curse, and set his heart free.

In order to do that, she went on a journey.

For the sake of the person she loved, she flew off to a gallant adventure.

And the result.

“.....”

The result!

Before she knew it!

A super beautiful woman came in between me and Ryner, jeez!

Geez, what is the meaning of this? I really want to cry out!

“..... geez, damn that Sion.”

She uttered without thinking.

“Eh?”

As the befuddled Ryner asked, Kiefer shook her head.

“No no. It’s nothing.”

Even though it wasn’t really nothing, but yet she said that it was nothing.

And again, she flashed a smile. She showed a grinning face.

It would be embarrassing if her flustered emotions about the appearance of a love rival were let known, so instead of focusing on these thoughts, she switched her attention to think

about other matters.

There were now three important matters that she had to consider.

Regarding the situation she was now in.

Regarding the situation Ryner was in.

Regarding the situation the country was in.

“.....”

First of all, the matter regarding herself was a simple one.

As commanded by the supreme ruler from the northern part of the continent. the king of Gastark Empire, Riphal Edea, she came here to rescue Ryner.

As asked, she came all the way here to bring Ryner back to Gastark.

Thus it was fortunate for her to be able to meet with Ryner just as she entered Roland.

But it was pretty unfortunate for her that Ryner had a beautiful woman for a partner.

Well, in any case, the situation that she was in now was not too bad actually.....

Now, regarding the situation that Ryner was in.

“.....”

She first looked at Ryner, then at the sleeping Ferris on the bed.

Ferris appeared to be attacked by someone, and had lost

consciousness as a result.

Her younger sister --- a girl by the name of Iris, who is now on the first floor of the tea-house, eating dango served by the shop owner --- had filled them in.

At that moment, Kiefer thought back on the words said by Iris.

It went something like this.

"Ermh, you see, Iris was waiting for Nee-sama, then there were a lot of black ghosts, and then Iris went 'Paang', but it didn't work at all! And then when Iris was running away, her back was 'Kappu'! 'Kappu-ed'! And then, that black man in black clothes, 'Stop!', Iris said but that guy didn't say a word! And then Nee-sama came, she came to save Iris but the black shadowy ghosts also 'Kappu' Nee-sama! And Iris said 'Stop!' and cried. But it was useless, both of us shouted 'Help us!', but it was useless. And on top of that, the black guy said that he was sent by Sion Nii-chan, and Nee-sama cried. While crying, both of us died. We were 'Kappu-ed' and died. But but 'Pah', Iris's eyes opened and came back to life. And then we were on the road. Nee-sama was still sleeping. Iris tried waking her up but she didn't, and then we came here!"

That was how it went.

By the time Iris finished recounting on what happened, thirty minutes had went by, but still, she could make neither head nor tail on what had transpired.

However, as she observed Ryner's expression then, it seemed like things didn't look too good.

She tried remembering the occasions when Ryner's face changed, and it was roughly during the time when Iris mentioned the following.

Black shadowy ghosts.

The black guy controlling them.

The black guy was sent by Sion.

Ferris and Iris had died once.

“.....”

From those four lines, Kiefer could only guess the following.

Ryner’s partner was attacked.

By who?

By a pursuer sent by Sion.

That’s how the situation was.

In other words, Sion had dispatched pursuers after Ryner. For some reason, currently, the two of them weren’t on the best of terms.

But, why?

There were various reasons that Kiefer could think of.

It had been three years since Kiefer left Roland.

However, she had been continually keeping tabs on the state of Roland. Travelling across the central part of the continent, arriving at the north, and finally reaching the most northern part of the continent, Gastark Empire, in the midst of all that, she had been acquiring plenty of information regarding the

status of Roland.

To quote, after having left the country for two years, Sion started a revolution and ascended the throne.

And in a year's time following that, Roland was merely focusing its energies and resources on domestic affairs, accumulating power.

Furthermore, she had heard from some well informed individuals up north, that after merging with the Kingdom of Estabul, the expanded Roland generated apprehension within the neighbouring countries, but during the reign of the peace-loving Hero King, Sion Astal, there shouldn't be any major problem.

And Kiefer couldn't agree more.

If it was Sion, he would first stabilize Roland from within, then use non-aggression diplomatic policies towards its neighbours, and bit by bit, strengthen Roland, she thought.

In fact, she was somewhat worried about that approach.

This was due to the insight she gained while she was in Gastark Empire, watching how the country invaded and overwhelmed various large nations in the north at an alarming rate.

And on top of that, she was right beside the king of Gastark Empire --- Riphal Edea, the Hero King of the North.

She was beside him, watching how the world changed in an instant the moment he stepped onto the stage.

She was beside him, watching how Gastark swallowed up various large nations in the northern part of the continent.

She saw how the other countries in the upper portion of Central Menoris, due to fear of Gastark's power, started strengthening their military and seeking to increase their territory, stirring up war after war.

In fact, it was very probable that the flames of war would spread across the entire continent of Menoris.

No, the truth was it was already happening.

That was why she was somewhat worried about Roland.

She was wondering how could the gentle, peace-loving Sion deal with the chaotic situation of a war-torn continent.

Of course, so as to speak, since Sion had come from a military background, he probably would be inclined to create a militaristic nation, she thought, but the problem was given his gentle nature, and the fact that he was an advocate of peace, would he really be able to properly build up Roland's army? That was what she was worried about.

That kind of Roland would just be destroyed by another country. That would really be kinda bad, huh? She thought.

"....."

But that was needless anxiety, as she found out later during her journey back to Roland, after being ordered by Riphal to bring Ryner back to Gastark.

What she thought to be a peace-oriented Roland had started invading Nelpha.

And the army that invaded Nelpha was an abnormally enhanced one, a result of human experiments.

Furthermore, they were killing even surrendering soldiers, and

women as well as children.

“.....”

She never would have thought that the Sion she knew would actually act in such an entirely different manner.

But regarding that.

She didn’t think that Ryner would actually forgive such a thing.

Sion had changed.

But Ryner had not changed.

Wasn’t that the reason why the friendship between the two had come apart?

“.....”

As she was thinking along those lines, she looked at Ryner, who was looking intently at the sleeping Ferris on the bed while carrying an expression that appeared to be deep in thought.

And then she asked.

“Hey Ryner.”

“..... hn ~?”

“Well you see..... there’s something I’ve been meaning to ask you.”

“Uh-huh.”

“What in the world..... actually happened to Sion?”

Instantly.

He looked in this direction with a slightly surprised expression. He seemed about to say something, then took on a troubled expression followed by a sad expression.

And she began,

“.....Ryner?”

As she asked, he took on an apologetic look.

“.....”

But still, he said nothing.

Once again, she looked at him intently and then asked.

“..... what in the world..... happened between the two of you during the three years when I was away from the country?”

On hearing that, he first looked in this direction, then turned his head to look outside the window at the falling rain,

“..... it’s because I didn’t make any effort at all, which resulted in Sion being driven to the wall.”

He then filled Kiefer in on the events that had taken place during the three years when Kiefer was away.

About the report that Ryner had written in prison.

That was a report about *Rule Fragment* --- no, according to Ryner’s terminlogy, Heroes’ Relics.

About Sion becoming king during that time and making Ferris accompany Ryner on a journey in search of the Heroes’ Relics.

About Ryner returning to the country and working alongside Sion.

But those were quiet, peaceful days and he was unaware that Sion had already been driven to the wall.

Without Ryner's knowledge, Sion had carried on Roland's past human experiments and completed them.

And on the final day.

About Sion wanting to kill Ryner.

About him weeping while he wanted to kill Ryner.

About him saying incomprehensible things such as if he didn't kill Ryner, he won't be able to save him.

About Sion not killing Ryner in the end in spite of that.

About how Sion appeared to be possessed by something strange, and how his appearance had changed.

And finally about Ryner being thrown into prison, and Ferris rescuing him thereafter, and now that they were leaving the country.

"....."

While Ryner was talking, he smiled.

With a half-crying look, he smiled mockingly at himself.

"It's because I didn't make any effort."

"It's because I didn't notice Sion's distress."

He smiled as he said that.

But, he would save him, he said.

To compensate for him running away all this while, he shall

strive seriously this time, and save him, he said.

“.....”

All that had happened were things beyond Kiefer’s imagination.

After asking, in the end, Kiefer also could not comprehend why things had come to such a state.

However.

There was a person who had predicted this.

Riphal.

Before sending off Kiefer to Roland, the king of Gastark Empire, Riphal Edea had said the following.

"I want you to save Ryner from the monster of the south --- Sion Astal."

Initially, Kiefer did not understand what he meant by that.

That was a matter of fact.

Since Sion was a friend and classmate from the same academy. And besides, in the past, Ryner and Sion were very good friends, and she couldn’t fathom how their friendship could have changed.

But Riphal said something different.

With a serious gaze, he looked straight at Kiefer and said something different.

And then, following that, the story which Riphal told her was

something beyond Kiefer's comprehension.

Even though they were talking about Ryner and Sion, Riphal suddenly started telling a very old fairy tale of the past.

What kind of story are you telling me?, Kiefer had asked but Riphal just ignored her and continued.

"....."

Kiefer started recalling that particular story.

That was truly a very old story written in ancient text.

By now, no one could guess how long ago was that. It was an ancient story that was even further back in time than before this continent, Menoris, was born.

Herself, Ryner, Sion, Riphal, no, in fact, everything that existed in this world right now, could not be traced nor linked back to the time of that story.

A legend or a myth, it had become.

But, Riphal continued.

Even when Kiefer asked what kind of story is this, Riphal merely ignored and continued.

The characters were *Goddesses*, *Mad Black Hero*, and the sacrificial *Lonesome Demon*. It was a story about them.

As Riphal intentionally brought out the tomes in which the story was written in indecipherable ancient text and showed them to Kiefer, he told the story.

To summarize the main points of the story, this was how it went.

♦ ♦ ♦

Long, long ago, there were **Goddesses** who had lived since the primordial days.

The *Goddesses* were protecting *Something'*.

That *Something* was at the centre of this world, and was the source of energy for all that was in the world, and it was everything to everything that existed.

As the *Something* was truly a thing of importance, if *Something* was hurt, everything would turn to nothingness.

Therefore, day by day, the *Goddesses* took great care to protect *Something*.

But at that point, a single *Hero* was born.

He was born with great power.

The *Hero* blessed with God's love, was shown love and affection by everyone, and grew up.

But because that power of his was too great, he was wrapped by this thing called solitude.

Before long, drowned in his own power, the *Hero* sunk deeply into madness and darkness.

This darkness was pitch-black and enshrouded everything.

"Let's turn everything into nothingness."

“Let’s turn everything into nothingness.”

“Let’s turn everything into nothingness.”

The *Mad Black Hero* was mad.

He was mad.

He was mad.

While raving in madness, he sunk even deeper.

First to paint the world black.

With his sword, he would paint the world black.

But that was not enough.

Even if he ate everything, it was not enough.

It seemed like he wanted to further go on to kill and eat the *Goddesses*.

It seemed like he wanted to lay hands on the *Something* that the *Goddesses* were protecting.

Every single *Goddess* was to be killed.

But the *Goddesses* resisted with everything they got.

And somehow, they managed to give birth to a means of sealing the *Mad Black Hero*.

The result was something called *Human*.

Consequently, the *Mad Black Hero* was successfully sealed far away, in the southern part of the land.

After he was sealed, his power only extended to the southern

part of the land.

And for a long time, the world was quiet, ensued with peace.

But the *Mad Black Hero* had yet to give up.

I'm going to paint everything black.

I'm going to paint everything black.

I'm going to paint everything black.

He continued chanting.

He was truly mad.

However, no matter how much he rampaged on, he could not break the seal of the *Goddesses*.

The peace continued.

For a long time.

But during that peace, a problem, unnoticed by the *Goddesses*, arose.

At the extreme end of the south, lived another monster.

A sole demon resided there.

During the time he was born, all by himself, in loneliness, he was crying out in tears.

But that voice reached no one.

That was how he was born.

His form was too hideous, and no one could see it.

His voice was too repulsive, and it reached no one.

All alone, all alone, all alone, to the point where he felt like dying.

But that solitude, seemingly unseen by anyone, was what he was born into.

That was exactly the reason why the *Goddesses* failed to notice the solitary demon.

Right from the start, that demon's form could not be seen.

But in that place where the demon dwelt --- the back side of the world, a single monster arrived.

It was the *Mad Black Hero*.

He was completely mad.

He kept on wailing about he was going to turn everything into nothingness, for a long, long time.

He wailed that he was going to paint everything black.

But the demon in solitude was delighted to see that *Mad Black Hero*.

He never thought that someone would come to his dark dwelling.

He thought he would continue crying as he spent eternity in solitude.

But now, right before him, was the *Mad Black Hero*.

The *Mad Black Hero* felt his own loneliness caused by the great power he possessed, and was wailing with tears in his eyes.

Upon seeing that, the demon greatly sympathized with him.

The demon had experienced solitude after all.

"We can definitely become friends", he said.

And he danced joyfully to the side of the *Mad Black Hero*.

Singing songs.

Talking a lot.

The *Mad Black Hero* just kept on saying how he would turn everything into nothingness, but yet, the demon felt that he was no longer alone, and he was both grateful and blissful.

"A friend!"

"I have a friend!"

"I have a friend here!"

"I'm no longer alone!"

He shouted as he kept on dancing.

And that weakness his feelings bore.

Those pitiful feelings.

Were made used by the *Mad Black Hero*.

The *Mad Black Hero* said.

<< I want to get out of here. You have the power to help me do that. Can I devour half of you? Would you let me devour half of you? >>

And the lonesome demon, whose name was *All Equations*,

said.

<< Sure sure. Sure sure. Because you are my first friend. For your sake, something like half of my body is no big deal. >>

And then the lonesome demon, who was called *All Equations*, split into two parts, the *Weaver of All Equations* and the *Solver of All Equations*.

Immediately, the *Weaver of All Equations* was devoured by the *Mad Black Hero*.

Even though the demon felt excruciating pain, he smiled.

<< This is no big deal for the sake of my first friend. For the sake of my best friend, this is no big deal. >>

At last, after the *Mad Black Hero* obtained the power from devouring the *Weaver of All Equations*, he successfully gave birth to a means of breaking the barrier deployed the *Goddesses*.

That was a magic known as *Human Alpha*.

That was almost the same type of magic created by the *Goddesses*.

Controlling the *Human Alpha", he broke the* Human.

Immediately, the *Human Alpha* started killing the *Human*.

The *Human Alpha* made countries, grew up, and then started invading the world created by the *Human*.

And before long, the *Human Alpha*, once again, arrived at the

center of the world.

At the centre where the *Goddesses* were.

At the centre where the *Something* was.

The *Human Alpha* killed the *Human*, they killed, they killed, they killed and arrived there, creating a path in the process, and this was the path that the *Mad Black Hero* walked.

The cries of anguish and despair along the path he walked through was buried in darkness.

Throughout his path, the *Goddesses* were crying out in agony and resisting the *Mad Black Hero*.

But they died.

They all died.

The *Mad Black Hero* devoured them.

The *Mad Black Hero* laughed as he devoured them.

Finally, he lay his hands on *Something*.

Of course, that was also devoured by the *Mad Black Hero*.

But the problem arose from there.

The *Something* possessed too great a power which the *Mad Black Hero* could not hold in his hands.

The *Mad Black Hero* hollered once again.

Help me.

Help me.

Even though he wanted to turn the world into nothingness, he was going to die before accomplishing that.

Help me.

Help me.

Can someone take on this darkness and pain in place of me?

On hearing the cries of his best friend, the lonesome demon took pity on him again. And he thought of taking on the suffering in place of his friend.

The lonesome demon said that he was going to give up his other half, the *Solver of All Equations*.

<< Well then, you can use the remaining half of my body. You can put the darkness in. >>

And then the *Mad Black Hero* ate the remaining half of the lonesome demon.

And he took from within himself, the bad portion of *Something* and pushed it into the lonesome demon.

And that was the end of the lonesome demon.

Even though the demon hollered in agony, all his cries were devoured by *Something*.

Like some lowly lifeform, the anguish of the lonesome demon, his cries, his eyeballs, his heart, his innards, his grey matter, were all devoured, devoured, devoured, even when everything was devoured completely, his pain did not disappear.

No matter how much time had passed, it did not disappear.

It just went on for eternity.

The hell of eternity started once again.

Pain and loneliness.

Solitude.

Solitude.

Solitude.

His solitude went on.

But even so, the lonesome demon had no regrets.

He had made a friend even if it was only for an instant.

He had lived for a friend even if it was only for an instant.

The lonesome demon was a fool.

A fool till the very end.

And then everything ended.

The *Mad Black Hero*, while laughing, turned the world into nothingness.

The world that had existed till now came to an end.

Once again, the world was reborn into a different one.

Only the lonesome, solitary, foolish demon was reborn without any change, and for eternity, he continued hollering in anguish and suffering.

♦♦♦♦

Kiefer recalled that fairy tale-like story which, after Riphal finished telling, left a strangely bad aftertaste.

That was the tale which Riphal read out to her though the details were still lacking in accuracy (for example, the actual glyph that *Something* was written in could not be deciphered by Riphal and the other scholars, that's why for now, it was just termed as *Something*..... something to that extent), but the story in that tale was roughly along those lines.

It was an incomprehensible tale that did not seem to have anything to do with herself.

But, Riphal said that this would be something that was going to happen again.

And the characters appearing this time would be Ryner and Sion.

Ryner is the *Solver of All Equations* --- in other words, the half of the lonesome that would be made used of, and devoured.

Sion is the *Mad Black Hero*.

Initially, when Kiefer heard the story, she was doubtful about Riphal's sanity. What in the world is this guy talking about, she thought then.

Indeed, Ryner was just a slightly special person. As an *Alpha Stigma* bearer..... but yet, he was just slightly different from the other "Alpha Stigmas".

But she did not think that there would be a link between him and someone from a fairy tale.

It was the same with Sion. He was a capable person with outstanding results in the same academy that Kiefer was attending, and on top of that he had royal blood flowing in his veins.

By ‘special’, that was what she thought.

Although that was what she thought, they were still humans after all.

Just like Kiefer, they were humans who fretted and brooded over things in their own lives.

At the very least, they weren’t monsters that were capable of moving the world.

But yet, Riphal said otherwise.

He looked at Kiefer with sorrowful eyes and said.

The two people that Kiefer saw, they were humans..... but the story has already started. It is not the fault of those two. It is not the fault of Ryner Lute and Sion Astal. If Ryner was not born with those eyes..... if Sion did not open that door, if he have not wanted to open it..... but he did. He was going after something that made him have to open it..... and the moment he laid hands on what’s inside, the story started."

That was what Riphal said.

But she still could not comprehend the full meaning of he said. Kiefer listened with an expression that said, *what in the world is this person talking about*.

And he smiled at that.

Well, you will find out if you go to them. Though it's already too late for many things."

And that was the end of their conversation.

And then, with a great deal of doubt, Kiefer left Gastark and returned to Roland.

And right now.

"....."

Kiefer looked intently at the somewhat sad face of Ryner before her.

She looked at the face of Ryner, filled with sadness for not being able to save Sion.

Even though Sion was after his life, he was making a *I did not realize Sion's distress* lonely look.

Even though Sion wanted to devour him, he said, *To compensate for all that running away up till now, this time I'm going to give it my best and save him*.

Kiefer looked at Ryner who still called Sion a friend in spite of being betrayed by him.

And then she thought.

Kiefer thought.

Isn't this just like....., she thought.

Isn't this just like that story in that fairy tale?, Kiefer thought.

"....."

Solitary, lonely, foolish, yet kind demon.

That mad, sorrowful hero pressing on hurriedly.

All Equations.

Mad Black Hero.

Ryner.

Sion.

“.....”

I have to do something, she thought.

What should I do, I have to do something, she thought.

But, how?

To bring Ryner back to Gastark as told?

But Kiefer knew in her heart that she couldn’t do that.

That’s just not possible. Even now, Kiefer still could not believe completely in that incredulous fairy tale-like story.

And after hearing Ryner out, despite..... Sion’s betrayal, his lies, Ryner still see him as a friend and would never agree to leaving all this behind and running away to Gastark.

No, perhaps, in order to save his best friend, he might even be willing to sacrifice himself.

Just like that demon in that story.

Just like that lonesome demon.

But she couldn't allow that. She couldn't allow that.

I can't allow Ryner..... I can't allow my Ryner to be devoured by Sion.

Well then, what should she do?

What should I do then?

"....."

Kiefer looked at Ryner.

He was again looking at his unconscious partner who was attacked by pursuers sent by Sion.

The actions taken by Sion already demonstrated his lack of mercy.

To kill Ryner, and to kill his partner as well.

"....."

How did things come to this?, she thought.

After coming back to Roland, together with Ryner and Sion, the three of us could reminisce on the good old days, she had had some of those thoughts before.

Even though Toni, Tyle, and Fahl were dead, and it was no longer the same as before, but still, the three of them could still meet and laugh together, she had carried some of those thoughts all by herself.

"....."

She needed to amend the image of Sion in her memory, she thought.

Although the conversation earlier did spark off a desire to save Sion for an instant, she could only do so much within her limitations.

First, she needed to save Ryner.

Then, she would think of what's next.

She looked at Ryner and said.

"You know, Ryner."

"Hn?"

"Does Ryner know of Gastark....."

As she said that, suddenly.

"....."

Abruptly, the sleeping peerless beauty before her sat up.

She opened her clear blue eyes and looked around her surroundings restlessly.

And Ryner began,

"Yo, Ferris. You are finally awake."

He said with a kind voice.

He said with a gentle, caring voice to the awakened princess.

That again, sparked off a pain within Kiefer's chest. As she thought, the two of them are in that kind of relationship, she thought.

And then the princess, once again, with a seemingly bewildered expression, looked around her surroundings

restlessly.

And then said.

“Yeah. I’m awake.”

“Are you feeling any pain anywhere?”

“..... pain?”

And then Ferris appeared to think for a while.

“..... hm. While I don’t feel any pain in my body, I do recall some painful memories.”

That was what she said. She had a half-asleep and dazed look on her expressionless face.

That face was a beautiful and cute one, and Kiefer seemed to groan out, *Hah-ooh ~ m*.

Ryner looked intently at Ferris's face.

"Painful memories?"

Ferris nodded.

"Yeah. Painful memories."

Her behaviour created a spur of anxiety in Kiefer and she started thinking earnestly. This Ferris girl's behaviour did not match what Ryner said to be.

Just a while ago, Ryner,

You are tricked by what you see, you need to experience it for yourself. She truly is a demon down to the core."

That's how he had described her, but that didn't seem to be

the case however.

She's like an obedient cute kid who had just woken up.

Ferris stared at Ryner.

"I remembered some painful memories."

As if she was using a matching response to being comforted, she said it in a very sweet, lovely manner.

And Ryner promptly took in that sweetness.

"Hm. Well then, why don't you tell me about those painful memories of yours?"

He said.

Eh, wait a minute, wait a minute, Kiefer thought.

What.. so the two of them do have that kind of relationship? They are already on such intimate terms, and am I acutally the one who is coming in between them?

As she was on the brunt of that thought.

Something unbelievable took place before her very eyes.

Ferris propped her body away from the bed and leaned close towards Ryner. Is Ferris going to hug Ryner, that was the first thing Kiefer thought of.

Eh ~ wait a minute ~!!

She was about to cry out.

She thought her heart was going to stop.

But in the next instant.

"This is for my painful memories!"

And, for some unknown reason, Ferris swung her fist towards Ryner with an unbelievable force.

Instantly.

"Woah, I've thought that this would happen somehow."

Having predicted her move, Ryner stopped her punch.

And he smirked.

"Hahhun. With that strangely disgusting sweet voice, I could see this coming....."

But he was cut off there and then.

Ferris lifted her left arm, and pressed her elbow towards Ryner's face, and he,

"I'm stopping this one too!!"

And he stopped it in a frantic manner.

But that was the end of his resistance.

Ferris launched her knee upwards at a speed that was beyond Kiefer's ability to follow. And it connected with Ryner's chin.

"Arghh."

Following a cry of pain, Ryner's whole body was lifted into the air, and with a sharp crashing sound, Ryner's head broke through the tea-house ceiling, which was made of wood, and was stuck there.

Ryner's body hung from the ceiling of the tea-house, seemingly about to fall off anytime.

"....."

Kiefer was at a complete loss for words.

But the thing is, isn't Ryner that, erm? Isn't he super strong?

Formerly known as the **Greatest Magician of Roland**, there should not be anyone in Roland who could come close to his power, isn't that how strong he was?

And that.

What was all that about?

What's with this woman?

No, aside from that, why is she doing this all of a sudden?

She couldn't understand a thing.

"....."

While Kiefer could only stare at this incomprehensible scene in which Ryner was attacked suddenly and sent crashing into the ceiling in which he was now stuck in, Ferris, with satisfaction,

"Good!"

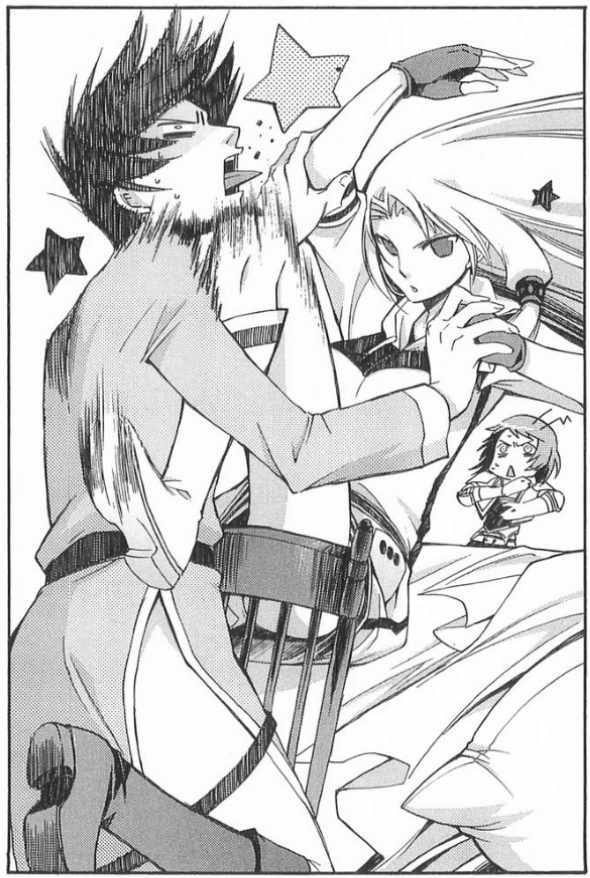
She exclaimed.

As she did that, Ryner pulled his head out of the ceiling,

"This is nothing gooooooooddddddddddddddd! Damn you, were you trying to kill me!"

He bellowed.

And Ferris,



"Ohh, you've returned to life, Ryner!"

"I didn't die, duh!"

"Then die. Come back to life after you die."

"Wha.. I don't get you! What's this all about..... wait, don't draw your sword!"

Even with Ryner shouting, Ferris did not stop. With her slender arm, she picked up the large sword placed in the corner of the room, which to a stranger, might seem too much for her to handle, and swung it skillfully back and forth around her.

She swung the sword swiftly around a few times as if she was slashing at wind. As she did that, everything around her was sliced into fine pieces.

The bed, the chair, the stand, everything was sliced into unbelievably fine pieces without a sound.

That swordsmanship was abnormal. Among the things she sliced were objects made of iron as well, and yet, she sliced them apart effortlessly.

That was a truly majestic sight to behold.

It was such a majestic sight that anyone who was witnessing it would easily gasp out in amazement reflexively.

But Ryner instead,

"..... wha, what are you doing swinging that sword around in this cramped room? It was kind of scary..... so what in the world is the meaning of this?"

Kiefer applauded silently at his question.

A peerless beauty, emotionlessly, expressionlessly, swinging her sword around.

Looking at the scene before her, Kiefer once again, thought back to Ryner's words earlier.

"You are tricked by what you see, you need to experience it for yourself. She truly is a demon down to the core."

Ah, so it was true.....

Kiefer thought.

It did seem to her now that there was no special relationship, love relationship to be precise, between the two of them.....

But, at that moment.

"..... hm."

Finally satisfied, Ferris sheathed her sword at her waist.

And then, as Ryner and Kiefer breathed out a sigh of relief, Ferris looked at both her hands and wriggled her fingers, ascertaining their movements.

"..... seems like I can move them as usual."

She said.

Ryner dropped down from the ceiling. And then looked intently at Ferris.

"Ah ~ so that's what it was all about."

He said.

While Kiefer could not understand Ferris's actions, it seemed like Ryner had understood.

Kiefer asked Ryner,

"What was all that?"

In response, he replied.

"..... probably like what Iris mentioned earlier, Ferris had incurred severe wounds from the assault of our pursuer that

Sion had sent. But now....."

However, just with those words, Kiefer already knew what he was going to say.

Ferris should be bearing severe wounds from that attack by her pursuer, but as far as Kiefer could see, she had not a single wound. In fact, she seemed perfectly fine.

She swung her sword around in order to ascertain that.

At that moment, Ryner continued. And looked at Ferris.

“..... so, what happened when I was not around? Iris thought you had died from incurring severe wounds.”

Ferris nodded.

“My tendons in both my arms and legs were severed and my limbs were almost torn apart.”

At those words, Kiefer looked at Ferris’s figure again.

However, Ferris’s arms and legs looked perfectly fine to her and on top of that, her clothes were in perfect condition.

With a slender, nice body with a great style, she was wearing a one piece dress with a short skirt portion and cute logo of three polka-dots lined up in a straight line. Her belt and boots were of the same brand and fitted her nicely.

After seeing that, Kiefer became flustered and started looking at her own clothes.

Even though the insignia was removed, what she was wearing was a light armour from Gastark Empire. Somehow, Riphal had prepared it to be somewhat cute and revealing, specially for her personal use, but still, it was not a girly one piece.

Looking at her own light armour, *ahh geez, why didn't I change my clothes before stepping into Roland*, she thought.

Even though I've already prepared a number of clothes for the reunion with Ryner, what the heck am I doing?

But but, it can't be helped I guess. I never would have thought that I would see Ryner so soon, right after entering Roland.

And besides, I never would have thought that such a beautiful woman is by the side of Ryner.

"..... uuw."

Ahh, but still, it's my mistake. It's my mistake for not dressing properly before coming into the country where the person I like is in. Stupid me. I'm so stupid.

"..... uuuww ~"

Even as she fretted, fretted, it changed nothing.

Ferris's limbs were perfectly fine and her clothes were in perfect condition, with no evidence of her being attacked.

In other words, there was not a single scratch on her.

Ryner then said.

"..... were you under an illusion spell of sorts?"

But Ferris shook her head.

"That fella did not use any magic."

"That fella.....? In other words, Froaude?"

Ferris's face darkened slightly at his words and looked intently at Ryner.

“.....did you hear that from Iris?”

“A black man in black clothes calling forth black ghosts, kapu ~ =(equals) that fella right? But, that damn Froaude, despite telling us he was from Stohl Empire, so he was actually Sion’s subordinate..... when was the first time we meet him again?”

“I’ve forgotten.”

“Don’t forget duh.”

“Mm? Then do you remember?”

Ryner nodded at that question.

“If I remember correctly, it was at Toale’s place, I think. Wait, you do remember Toale, don’t you?”

Ferris promptly replied,

“Nope.”

“Wait wait, remember at least that much!”

In the midst of their bantering, Kiefer spoke without reservation.

“..... erm, you are talking about Toale Nelphi? The one currently fighting alone against Roland in Imperial Nelpha.”

Ryner nodded.

“Orh, right right, You are pretty well informed, Kiefer.”

Following that, Ferris, for the first time, looked towards here.

“.....”

For some reason, she seemed to be staring at her. With her

almond-shaped, clear, blue eyes, she was staring this way at her.

“.....”

Kiefer thought she was going to say something, but she did not.

Without saying a word, she stareeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeed this way at her.

“.....”

And then.

“.....”

Unable to bear the silence anymore, Kiefer said.

“Ah, ah, erm..... sorry for the late greeting. This is the first time we meet. I’m a friend from the same Royal Military Special Academy that Ryner studied in, Kiefer Knolles is my name.”

She said.

Then Ferris looked in the direction of Ryner,

“An acquaintance?”

“Ah, yeah. Kiefer is a classmate friend of mine. The same with Sion as well.”

“Sion too?”

“Yeah.”

After Ryner nodded, she looked towards here once more. She looked at her face, then her body, then at her face again, and

said.

“..... I see. So Ryner, this is the rumored girl whom you’ve always been talking about?”

At those words,

“..... eh?”

Kiefer’s heart skipped a beat. Feeling surprised, without thinking, she turned towards Ryner.

Rumored girl?

What’s that?

Does Ryner speak of me often with this person?

Eh, does that mean..... does that mean.....

Erm, I’ll be really happy if they were nice rumors, but if he told her of that incident where I forcibly kissed Ryner like a moronic woman wellll, that kind of rumor would be, erm, I’m erm, I, ahh wahh wahh.

While she was fretting and getting flustered all by herself, Ryner, with a weary face,

“Doh, I have never once mentioned anything about Kiefer to you. You are starting that troublesome parallel fantasy againnn.....”

But Ferris cut him off and continued.

“No no, at this juncture, there is no need to hide it anymore. The person called Kiefer, is that girl right? The next girl after you forcibly attacked Milk Callaud one night and caused that pitiful girl to become pregnant, she’s that second victim right?”

After she said that,

“Pre, pregnant!?”

Kiefer cried out, and Ryner faced her, with a tired voice.

“Right, over there, don’t react so naturally to weird things.”

“Bu, but, pregnant..... I didn’t know, during all this time, Ryner already has a kid.....”

“Hell like I do!”

On the side of that exchange, Ferris continued with her parallel story.

“Having a desire to seduce and lay their hands on the young girl Kiefer who’s still a student, the wild beasts Ryner Lute and Sion Astupidl one night, while reeking of alcohol, carried out such a conversation, *"Let’s do that girl!"*.”

On hearing that, Kiefer looked at Ryner again.

“Tt, tthat so!?”

“No waaayyyyyyyy, wait, shouldn’t you know best that this isn’t true?”

Ignoring the yelling Ryner, Ferris continued on.

“However, the two of them who normally appeared to be buddies are the type to show their true colors when it comes to woman.”

“What type are you talking about, doh.”

The story continued, rendering Ryner’s rejoinder useless.

“Before long, the two of them started quarrelling. Ryner said. 'I

was the first to set my eyes on that girl! I should be the first to attack her!' But Sion did not give in. 'Fool, who do you think is the king of this country? Me, you know? It's not you, you know? That's how it is. I shall go first'."

Ryner, with a resigned expression,

"No wait, Sion wasn't king yet then."

Ferris nodded as well.

"That's right. Even though Sion wasn't king yet then, but he was a fool who has already assumed the air of one."

"Ah, that's true."

"You see."

"Yeah yeah."

"Well then, I'm going to go on."

"No, this is the place where you are going to stop that stupid story, thankfu..... ugh-arghhhh."

Ryner was sent flying.

And Ferris continued further.

The contents of the story talked about how Ryner in the end assaulted Kiefer, made her pregnant, and ran away hollering how he would not take responsibility, which made Sion so angry that he sent out pursuers, and these pursuers, just a while ago, almost killed Ferris; and that was how it was forcibly connected to the current state of affairs,

"In other words, it's all thanks to you that I got embroiled in a huge troublesome thing, and that's how I ended up here in this manner!"

Looking at that peerless beauty who said that,

“.....”

Kiefer was dumbfounded.

She had a completely dumbfounded expression.

Because this was the first time she had met such a person.

Even though Riphal could be overbearing at times in his conversations, but this was the first time she met someone who would beat up the person who makes a comeback and actually carry on her own meaningless story after that.

And right now, she had that self-satisfied expression.

Looking at her,

“.....”

Kiefer, once again, recalled the words from Ryner.

Demon at the core.

This.

Isn’t this fine?

She thought.

She had thought that, with such a beautiful and cute face, Ferris would have been a strong love rival, but perhaps, not so with that kind of personality?

As Kiefer looked in the direction where Ryner was sent flying, he got up with a tired expression, looking as if he was already used to such developments.

“..... so, are you satisfied?”

He asked.

As he did so, Ferris nodded with lots of vigor. She nodded vigorously, apparently feeling good.

“Uh-huh. Satisfied.”

“Then can we continue this seriously?”

“No way.”

“Eh ~. What more do you still want?”

On hearing that, she looked in the direction of Kiefer and said.

“So, what does the old friend of Ryner want from us now? Were you sent by Sion?”

Kiefer shook her head frantically.

“No, I’m not. I have not seen Sion in years. And I’ve not been back to Roland for years as well.”

“Then what? Why did you appear at this kind of timing?”

“Eh..... ah, no, that is.....”

As Kiefer fumbled with her words, Ryner also looked towards here,

“Ah right. I’ve not asked you earlier since my hands were full. Where did Kiefer go after leaving the country and why did you come back?”

On hearing those words.

“.....”

Kiefer was somewhat hurt by those words.

"Why did you come back?"

Was it really bad to come back just because I want to see Ryner?, she thought a little.

The truth was that there was no other reason for her to come back anyway.....

She set off on a journey in order to save Ryner, in order to save Ryner.....

In order to see him again, she came back.

Other than that, there was no meaning to coming back here.

That's why Kiefer said.

"..... that, erm."

Both Ryner and Ferris looked at her.

Even with blood rushing to her head, and feeling her face flushed, she did her best.

"..... err, erm, I came back..... to see Ryner....."

That was what she said.

Even though she was about to scream out *Kyaaaaaaaaaa*, she held it in, and just screamed silently in her heart.

As she took a glance at Ryner, he had that face again.

The troubled withdrawn look.

But even if he were to take a step backwards, she was determined to pay no heed and come back anyway. Even if he

thought of himself as a monster and ran away, she was determined to give chase and stay by his side.

That was why she set off on a journey.

In order to save him from solitude, she set off on a journey.

That's why Kiefer added one more line.

"Erm..... I, I, I....."

She took one more step forward.

"..... ever since, in the past, till now..... I have liked Ryner."

One step forward.

Instantly.

"....."

Ryner did not say anything. He only made a troubled expression. A lonely, tired expression.

Just like three years ago.

If she drew near him, he would definitely take a step backward. Maintaining a distance where he would not hurt her. Maintaining a distance where he would not kill her.

He would place a distance between himself and the other party so that his cursed self would not cause any hurt to the other party.

His reaction was just the same as before.

That was an expected reaction.

That's why she went no further than that.

But.

“.....”

But beside him.

She saw a very faint change in what should have been a normally expressionless face from the peerless beauty beside him.

That was truly a subtle change that occurred for merely an instant, and would probably have gone unnoticed by someone who was not involved nor interested in the current state of affairs between them.

But Kiefer saw it.

An almost instantaneous look of surprise had flashed across Ferris’s fair, beautiful and what should have been a normally expressionless face.

And then.

“.....”

And then Ferris,

“..... ah, I.....”

She said in a seemingly shaking voice. But that was all she said. Which was more than enough. Kiefer understood everything just from that alone.

Ahh, so that’s how it is.

She thought.

Ahh, so that’s how it is. Just as I thought, she also, towards Ryner.....

“.....”

Her thoughts trailed off.

All of a sudden, Ferris’s face underwent an even greater change than before. Surprise, teary, happiness-filled face.

And then, with a shaking voice,

“Da..... da, da.....”

She started off.

And Ryner began,

“Huh? What’s up? What’s going on?”

He asked.

But as usual, she ignored him,

“Da, da, dango’s aroma, why?”

She said.

And then Ryner,

“Huh? Dango? Ah, that, because this is that place. The place where we were supposed to meet up, Asohld dango tea-house.....”

Before he could finish, suddenly.

“Why didn’t you say so earlieeeeeer!!”

“Gyaaaaaa.”

She beat him up again. Ryner was sent flying with cries of anguish again. But she ignored all that and started running.

And she stepped on Ryner who was in her path,

“I’m leaving for a bit!”

And she rushed out of the room with an incredible speed.

Her actions were already beyond Kiefer’s comprehension.

“Eh? Eh? Eh?”

That was the only thing she could utter.

But, but, that was definitely weird right?

I just confessed to Ryner.

And Ferris probably liked Ryner as well, she thought.

And a stand off between two love rivals might possibly suddenly ensue!

Even though it was such an intense situation.

And Ferris suddenly shouted *I smell dango*, which was pretty much incomprehensible, and then she beat up Ryner and rushed out of the room.

“..... what, what in the world happened to her?”

Kiefer asked.

On hearing that, Ryner, with a 'this is nothing new' tone, answered.

“..... she’s a person who places as much importance on dango as life itself.”

“Wait, that doesn’t tell me anything.”

“No no. I’m serious. It’s always like that with her, you see. She would always shout *I like dango*, and beat me up to death, and beat Sion up to death.”

“Eh, then she really went off to eat dango?”

Ryner nodded at Kiefer’s query.

And then she went on,

“Eeeeeehhhhh, bu, but, but the conversation just now, it wasn’t really the time to eat dango.....”

But Ryner shook his head.

“That’s the kind of person she is.”

“Bu, but.....”

“No really, if you follow after her seriously, you might die.”

“..... is, is that so?”

“Yup yup.”

“.....”

Ryner then got up.

“Well, for now, let’s go downstairs as well, shall we? There are things I need to talk to Kiefer about, and there are things regarding Ferris’s attacker that we need to talk about..... and since we are currently really pursued by Sion, we need to discuss our next step, and we can do that while we eat dango..... then again, even though we might be safe for the time being, I doubt we could stay here for long.....”

While saying that, he was making his way out.

But Kiefer did not go after him.

She was, dumbfoundedly, thinking about what just happened.

Perhaps, Ferris was exactly the type of person Ryner said to be.

Perhaps, she's really not interested in the affairs of the heart, more like a child, she seemed to prefer dango to flowers?

That was evident.

Having no interest in Ryner. Placing more importance on dango than Ryner. That's why even when a girl came here to declare her love for Ryner, she's completely not bothered at all.

That was evident.

At the very least, that was evident to Ryner.

But.

"....."

Kiefer sighed softly and took a small whiff at the aroma floating around in the room.

Just as Ferris said, the room was filled with the aroma of dango.

But this aroma had been present all along since they entered the room. It was an aroma that a person who likes dango would have noticed upon waking up.

But it was only during Kiefer's love confession, that Ferris, with an apparently confused and flustered face, suddenly went talking about how she smelled the aroma of dango.

And rushing out of the room, as if she was running away.

That's right.

She was running away.

Even when she was such a strong person. Even when she was such a violent person. Even when she was such a willful person, she ran away with an apparently flustered face.

That was her.

"....."

That was her pure innocence which made her really cute, and Kiefer,

"..... uwah, what a strong opponent she might be."

She said with a small groan.

Then Ryner turned around,

"What's up?"

He asked.

He asked in a thoughtless manner.

And Kiefer looked intently at Ryner's face.

Looking intently at the face of the person she had wanted to see all along.

Looking at the face of the person who had caused much distress to various girls,

"Geez, it's all because of Ryner's fault."

“Huh?”

“Nothing. It’s noth~ing. Well, let’s go down. I’d also like to have some dango.”

As she said that, she closed in on Ryner. She then started to entwine her arm around Ryner’s arm.

“.....”

It was an easy thing before.

She had linked arms with Ryner before during maneuvering exercises, and also during pinning exercises as well. And she had always been with him then. Always right by his side. Making bento for him. But that was a long time ago.

That’s why, right now, just like before, she would cross her arm over Ryner’s effortlessly.

“.....”

But, she couldn’t do it.

At the point where she was about to do it, her heart was in her mouth, and threatened to jump out. That was how nervous she was.

No, rather, just by standing right beside the Ryner she had wanted to see for so long, was enough to make her heart burst.

Uwah, she thought.

This is bad, she thought.

If this keeps on, I’m going to lose. Even though nothing was happening, she seemed to be on the verge of tears.

Since it had been a while ever since she had stepped into Roland, she really want to make her feelings known to him.

It was no longer the same as before.

The world had changed.

Sion had changed.

Her former place beside Ryner was gone.

And on top of that, a beautiful woman, a cute rival had appeared.

She had to do her best.

She had to strive further.

More.

Put in more effort.

“..... eehhh!”

She grabbed hold of his arm.

“Orh?”

He said.

“Hehe ~ hn.”

She said.

Even though inside her mind, she felt that she did not have the leisure to go *hehe ~ hn*, but she did it anyway. And she hugged his arm tightly.

“Kiefer.”

“..... hn?”

“You are a little heavy.”

Instantly.

“Huuhh!? How can you say that to a girl!?”

While Kiefer yelled angrily, she gave a knock to Ryner’s head. And puffed up her cheeks, pouting angrily.

And again, Ryner had that troubled look on his face.

“.....”

It was the same scene as three years ago.

Three years ago, the very same scene, while it was still not too late for many things.

The admired honours student Sion, the good-for-nothing idiot Ryner, the busybody Fahl who was enthusiastically interested in the love affairs of others, the Toni who appeared to be in love with Fahl, and the easygoing Tyle who always cheered everyone up.

Among those.

Among those people, Kiefer would be the one telling Ryner not to take afternoon naps, and knocking his head while telling him to go for lessons quickly.

Kiefer started reminiscing.

“Kind of nostalgic.”

She said, and laughed.

But even while she said that, she was a little nervous.

Because she might be the only one thinking that. *Ryner didn't seem to remember much about me. It seemed like he could care less about what happened those days. I'm afraid I'm the only one getting pumped up on things.*

Well, it's been truly a long time since I came back, and Ryner-tteba, he just keep on making that troubled face, so terrible.

I'm coming close to my limits.

Even though I'm finally back.

Even though I've kept doing my best in order to see him again.

If he still doesn't smile one bit, I shall dash out and run away, hide myself in a corner and cry.

Uhn, I shall do just that.

Kiefer was committed to that ---

Instantly.

Ryner said.

While patting the head of Kiefer who was clinging to his arm,

"..... ahh, it's really nostalgic. After all this while, Kiefer finally came back, and it would be really nice to reminisce about our stupid past together with Sion, I guess."

That was what he said.

And with a smile directed here,

"Welcome back, Kiefer."

Ryner said.

“.....”

At that moment, Kiefer’s plan of dashing out to hide herself to cry was completely terminated.

Ryner had said “welcome back”, he had smiled, and finally all those unsettled feelings she had had were erased by his whole-hearted smile.

But yet, for some reason, Ryner started having a flustered expression,

“Wh, why are you crying Kiefer!?”

He said.

“I’m not crying.”

“You are!”

“These are tears of joy! I’m just overwhelmed with emotions at being able to see Ryner again.”

“Se, seriously?”

“Seriously.”

“..... is that so? Erm, so what shoud I do?”

“Just for a little while.”

“..... uh?”

“Just stay like this for a little while.”

Kiefer buried her whole face into Ryner’s chest. Burying all

those three years in which she had not seen him, ascertaining the warmth of his chest.

As expected, Ryner adopted his usual troubled expression, looked around him, then looked up at the ceiling, appearing busy with something, but she didn't care about that anymore.

Squeeze.

Squeeeeeeeeeeeze, that was due to her embracing him once.

"Alright!"

Kiefer said.

"Recharging completed!"

And she pulled away from Ryner.

As she did that, it seemed like he still had that troubled expression, unable to accept her feelings immediately, but even so, that was enough for her right now.

Because she knew that this was not the time for this.

That's why Kiefer said.

"Alright! Now, let's go plan out our next move!"

All of a sudden, Ryner made a face that seemed to be thinking of the various bothersome things that he had to deal with and said,

"..... ahh, seems like it's going to be suuuuppeerr botherso....."

But Kiefer interrupted him,

"Right right, stop complaining! The next lesson is already

starting!”

She pushed Ryner from the back and they started descending to the first floor of the tea-house.

And while Ryner was being pushed, he began,

“Uweh ~, lessons, what a super unpleasant wooooord.”

He groaned, making a truly unpleasant face.

And in response to that nostalgic face.

“.....”

Kiefer laughed again.

Chapter 4 - And Then The Balance Scales Used By The Demon

He looked down at the bodies.

At the cruelly chopped up bodies.

Countless bodies scattered around the hall, which was stained with a sea of blood. Looking at that.

“.....”

Sion said nothing.

He was now in the throne room of the castle of Roland Empire. In this place where the King of Roland Empire presides..... filled with numerous bodies scattered around, which was an unusual occurrence, yet,

“.....”

Sion --- the king of this country said nothing.

With his piercing golden eyes, in which a strong will was embedded, he merely looked upon the pile of brutally broken bodies before him.

“.....” He looked up slightly into the hall. No, rather, much deeper inwards, he is looking at **something** that is squirming.

Something he could not see clearly.

The attached magical lights that used to light up the hall were destroyed, and on top of that, a storm was beating against the window, making it extremely dark.

Yet in that darkness, he can sense **something** is squirming.

But there is no sound. Neither is there any visible presence seen.

He could only sense that something strange is squirming about. And that it was the same thing that caused the pile of bodies.

No, this is not something new.

This situation where Sion had merely closed his eyes for a moment and opened them again, to find before him, before he knew it, a pile of bodies --- a pile of bodies belonging to the

guards protecting this hall, with **something** creeping in within the same breath.

“..... again?”

Sion muttered as he fixed his gaze onto the **something** within that darkness.

“..... no matter how many times you try, you have no chance of winning in this land.”

"....."

A voice seemed to cry out from within the darkness. But it was too soft. Too feeble. Not quite audible.

“..... I can’t hear you. But there’s no need to. Lucile.”

In an empty space in the hall, an unusually beautiful man appeared immediately out of thin air. Lucile.

“..... ahh.”

Lucile mouthed before asking.

“Kill?”

Sion nodded.

“Ahh. Then, I’m going to do it.”

Immediately after saying that, in the very next instant, Lucile disappears and reappears in the depths of the darkness in the hall.

And a smile floated to his lips,

“..... there’s no use in hiding.”

He thrust a hand into one of the bodies scattered in the hall. He gouges into the bowels of the body, and appears to catch hold of something.... which he then forcibly pulls out.

A strange-looking monster was pulled out from the belly of the body. With a scaly face of a snake, smooth hands of a human, feathery wings of a bird, and gnarly legs of a spider. Skin which seemed to be festering with burns covering its entire body from the head to toe. What Lucile holds in his hand is the head of a monster, so hideous that it will cause a nauseating feeling to well up in any normal human beholding it.

“Gyu-ri-ru-e-ru-e-ru-e-ru-e!”

The monster gives off an ear-splitting howl. As it did that, the snake head stretched out and attempted to bite on Lucile’s shoulder.

“Disgusting.”

Lucile brushes it aside and just like that, the snake head disintegrates into nothingness.

But the monster’s movements does not stop; despite losing its head, it does not stop, and this time round, from its chest which clearly appears to be that of a spider, a jaw opens with fangs potruding out attempts to swallow Lucile.

Unfazed, Lucile just smiled happily.

“..... ha, haha, hahaha. What’s that. You wish to devour me? With your level of power, you wish to devour ME?”

As he says that, a different face appears at the shoulder of that monster. It is the face of a bird, and it replies to Lucile’s mocking query.

“..... do not be haughty. Descendant of Eris Reed. Your rampage ends here. The Goddesses’ rage has already reached their limit.....”

The bird stops mid-sentence at that moment because Lucile proceeds to snap its head off.

“..... the mad Goddesses, come again?”

And he crushes the birds head in his hand.

But still, the monster does not stop. The spider's fangs came thrusting again towards Lucile.

But Lucile appears to be unconcerned. He stretches out his hand quietly, and murmurs softly.

"Let me end this farce."

Instantly, he releases his power and everything ---

Should have ended..... But at that moment instead

"..... huh?"

Lucile's expression changes. A strange, small light appears from within the spider's mouth.

"..... darn....."

He couldn't continue.

The light, all of a sudden, explodes from the monster's body towards Lucile. No...It is exploding towards Sion, who is behind him. As he is being swallowed by the light, Lucile's body disappears and just as the light nears to swallow Sion's body, at that moment once again, Lucile reappears in front of Sion.

Holding a dark sword in his hand, Lucile swings at the light. As he does it, the light is split into two parts, even as it is being absorbed by the darkness of the sword.

"....."

This time round, everything is really over.

Once again, darkness and silence descends upon the hall.

“..... Lucile.”

Sion called out.

He looks upon the beautiful man before him, a man who should not lose to any kind of monster, a man who should be darker than any form of darkness,

“..... wasn’t that a little bad?”

Lucile turned around replying,

“No. There wasn’t any problem really.”

He is smiling.... smiling with his beautiful face. However what is smiling, is merely the right part of his face. The left part of his face..... no, his left hand, his left leg as well, the entire left part of his body is gone. Burned off by the light released from the mouth of the spider.

Sion, with a dubious face,

“It doesn’t seem that way to me though.”

But, Lucile merely shrugged his only shoulder.

“No problem at all.”

After saying that, with his remaining right hand, he give a knock on his own body.

The moment he does that, the remaining half of his body starts regenerating. The inner flesh of his body bulges out, and in a twinkle, his body returns to his former beautiful form.

That, in itself, is disgusting to behold.

Sion smiles wryly.

“Damn monster.”

To which Lucile mockingly replies,

“Hahaha. You hate your own kind?”

In other words, he means that Sion is a monster just like him. But Sion did not rebuke those words. For it is just as he says. At this moment, he is indeed kin with this disgusting monster --- or rather, he’s in the process of becoming something even worse than that.

“.....”

Without saying anything, Sion once again looks at the hall.

However, there is no longer any sign of that hideous monster resembling a combination of a snake, bird, and spider. It probably self-exploded.

In order to kill Lucile. No, in order to kill Sion --- who is the **Mad Black Hero**.

“But, this is actually the first time I've see you wounded in such a manner.” Sion says to Lucile, who is still looking in the direction of the hall.

“..... ahh. I let my guard down for a while. I didn’t expect the real thing would take the trouble to show up.”

Sion opens his eyes upon hearing Luciles words.

“..... the real thing? You mean the **Goddess**?”

Lucile nods.

“That was probably a part of Kukanohst [Goddess of Tranquility]. She sent in a part of her body by hiding it in the body of the familiar we just saw. But for her to have come all

the way over such a great distance at this kind of timing, the **Goddesses** seem to be in a fluster....."

Suddenly, at that moment,

<< Damn fools. >>

A high-pitched, an incomprehensibly high-pitched, ear-splitting woman's voice reverberated across the room. No, the voice probably did not reverberate across the room in reality. But, rather, the voice appears to be reverberating across the world, being delivered directly to their heads.

Sion turns to Lucile

"..... isn't it still here?"

Lucile smiled.

"That's right. Since I haven't killed it yet. What I erased earlier was merely an attack of the **Goddess**."

Once again at that moment,

<< Damn fools. >>

The same words was heard again. But this time, something seems different in those words. More accurately, something else is embedded in those words. A magical spell of fear is embedded in those words.

The **Goddess** had embedded a power that would erode the will and destroy the minds of her enemies, within those words.

In the past, perhaps Sion's sanity would have been destroyed,

leaving him fearful and raving in madness.

So to speak, it was the voice of a god; a divine message from God.

Man could only prostrate in fear and obey.

“Well, since I’m also a monster, it has no effect on me however.....” Sion murmured, as he shifted his eyes to search for the source of the voice within the hall.

“..... ah, I can’t do it. I can’t find it with my eyes, Lucile.”

Lucile had already found the fragment of the **Goddess** and while looking intently at a single point on the ceiling,

“..... what, Sion? You want to see her face?”

Sion nodded at his query.

“Yes, I’d like that. All this while, **Goddess**-sama has only sent her familiars here. Now that she has finally come forth herself, I have to show her proper hospitality.”

Lucile turned his head around,

“But if you do that, you will regret it, you know?”

“What do you mean by that?” Sion asked as he tilted his head.

Lucile merely smiled an icy smile; darker, colder, and more mocking than usual.

“Naturally I’m referring to the fact that, considering that she’s called **Goddess**, her appearance is surprisingly unbefitting of her title.”

With that, he lightly waved his hand in front of Sion’s eyes. And in that instant, the color of the world changed. Darkness

became darker just as light became brighter, overwhelming beholding eyes.

And within that darkness.... Within that darkness on the ceiling of the hall, where Lucile was looking up at, was a being, a female being clad all in light.....

A woman seemingly clad in a shining robe of feathers.

Gazing upon that form,

"..... ohh."

Sion gasps without thinking.

At her form...

Sion's face contorts instinctively at the **Goddess**'s form; as her form is abnormally hideous.

Attached to the ceiling on all fours, her face had no eyes. Merely hollow pools drowned in darkness, within its depths, abyss of darkness extends further. Occasionally, in that darkness, small bodies that looks like insects, can be seen moving in and out in a disgusting manner.

She has no nose, and her mouth is different from that of a human, stretching across vertically instead of horizontally with hundreds of teeth potruding outwards from that mouth. Adding to her bizarre appearance, below her grotesque head she has the same form as a human; no, her appearance encompasses everything that's revolting to humans.

And then, her vertically aligned mouth starts opening and closing, and her voice reverberates once again.

<< You worms. You worms, you worms. Why, why, why won't

you accept my, our, salvation? >>

She says in an incomprehensibly high-pitched earsplitting voice.

“See? It’s better not to see it, isn’t it?” Lucile says.

“.....”

Sion merely shrugged his shoulders without answering. No, he had roughly expected this outcome. He had long wondered about the appearance of the **Goddess** that had kept sending her monster minions one after another. Well, so it was something that looked like that, he thought.

A book that Lucile had shown him...

After having read that book in which the light and darkness of this world were chronicled, a story in which the **Goddesses** appeared, it was within his expectations that they were hideous.

As an example, a story in which they appeared went like this...

After living for too long, the desires of the mad **Goddesses** could not be stopped. They couldn’t be stopped even after they had obtained everything.

Devouring the **light** they created, devouring the **darkness** they created, devouring the **human** they created, even that

was not enough.

They want to devour more.

They want to devour.

They want to devour want to devour want to devour want to devour want to devour want to devour want to devour want to devour want to devour want to devour, want to devour want to devour want to devour want to devour want to devour want to devour want to devour want to devour want to devour want to devour

"But," Sion says as he looks up at the fragment of the hideous **Goddess** on the ceiling “...this time round..... things won’t go according to the way you all want. The ugly story that you all had created shall end here.”

The goddess, with her darkness embedded hollow eyes, looks his way and says,

<< Again. Again, a-g-a-i-n, again. Are you worms mad? Mad, m-a-d, m-a-d? Hero, my lovely hero..... deceived by ω[omega], deceived by α[alpha], deceived by the demon, are you intending to sell out this world again? >>

Upon hearing those words, Sion merely smiles thinly.

“So to speak, I know that there are already a number of versions of stories that are convenient to you circulating around the world.....”

That’s right.

With regards to that ancient story, there were several patterns to it.

A story about a hero destroying the world.

A story about a demon destroying the world.

And a story about goddesses destroying the world.

Every one of them had some degree of authenticity, but

simultaneously, every one of them was also inserted with convenient lies.

Even though it is not known who, nor for whose sake, created those stories. Or which strands of the story is real. Or who are the true protagonists of the story..... However, each and every one of them agree to one common point.....

Destruction of the world.

Well, in any case.....

At that moment, the voice of the **Goddess** reverberated again.

<< Accept our salvation. Accept our salvation. This is also for your sake. Now, accept it, accept it, and become the hero who saves the world..... >>

“Shut up..... you ugly **Goddesses**.” Sion says irritably.

Instantly, Lucile jumped.

“Jade Emperor’s tongue.”

He muttered raising his right hand. However, nothing came forth from that right hand; nothing could be seen.

But, even though there shouldn’t be anything there, the ugly face of the **Goddess** contorted in fear, making it even uglier.

<< Jade..... Jade Emperor, you mean.....? Impossible..... you, did you devour **God Pursuing**’s power? But that shouldn’t have been..... ω[omega]..... sword saint Eris Reed’s bloodline should not possess such a power..... >>

But, a smile floats to Lucile’s lips,

“Don’t think that I’ll always let the elderly..... the ancient gods do as they please. **God**, **God Pursuing**, and even **Goddess**, I shall devour everything.”, and then he swung down his hand at the **Goddess**.

The **Goddess** could do nothing. She could only make a surprised, fearful face as her body start disappearing.

<< ..... this..... my body..... is really being devoured..... what in the world are you..... >>

Her words trailed off.

The **Goddess** disappears and darkness returned.

Lucile lands in the center of the pile of bodies, he turns around.

“It has ended.....”

Immediately his knees buckles and he falls to the ground.

“.....”

Sion says nothing; he has seen this scene before. During the time when Lucile devoured a goddess and obtained her power. No, during the time when he devoured the power of **God**, **God Pursuing**, and obtained those powers, he was constantly tested.

Whether it was appropriate for him to possess those powers...

Whether it was appropriate for him to possess those powers to change the world...

Whether it was appropriate for him to rewrite the plot of that story that had continued endlessly...

He was being tested, had his power been lacking, he'd die. As long as he lived, he would move forward.

A simple matter.

Lucile, as well as Sion, is aware of that level of danger, and continues moving forward. Throwing away anything and everything. Laughter, sorrow, bliss, happiness, friends, family, comrades, life... sacrifices which would render a normal person to weep inconsolably; yet they continue forward.

People might say that's madness.

God might say that's madness.

Goddesses might say that's madness.

It might indeed BE madness. IS madness.

But, still, even so.....

"....."

If they live.

If they live, they would encompass this world in light, sundering all darkness.

That's why.

"....."

At that moment, Lucile got up.

"..... any problem?" Sion asks.

On hearing that, Lucile looks towards him and smiles. A smile darker, colder, and more empty than before.

“None.”

“Then.”

Sion says and Lucile nods.

“Ahh. Let’s continue.”

And Lucile disappears.

Once again, Sion is alone in the hall. He looks intently at the piled up bodies and sea of blood in front of him,

“..... mad, black hero, huh.....”

He moaned softly in a breaking voice that seemed on the verge of crying.

Suddenly,

“..... Your Majesty” a voice calls out.

Sion looks up. He looks across to the other side of the empty shells of his comrades, where a solitary man stands.

It is a man with a considerably strict, frowning face. Slightly more than thirty years in age. Wearing a sparkling clean military uniform, he stand tall and straight.

Major Rahel Miller.

The man responsible for the **Taboo Breaker Pursuit Squad**. The superior of Milk Callaud. No, the superior of that genius, Luke Stokkart; a very capable and intelligent man of this country. To say that the current Roland was made by Miller is not an overstatement. During the time when Sion was thinking of carrying out a revolution, Miller had already more or less set in place all the necessary pieces to start one. Sion merely became a gear in Millers plan and moved accordingly.

But, now...

Miller looks towards Sion with a stern, troubled face; a face that betrays he witnessed something beyond his understanding and imagination.

Sion smiles at that.

“..... you want to talk?”

On hearing that, Miller nods.

“Yes. I came here to inquire more details concerning the present situation of Roland.....”

After saying that, he looks around the hall, his gaze sweeping across the mountain of corpses before settling on Sion. Then his piercing eyes once again drifts about the empty space of the hall.

Is he looking for Lucile, or for the devoured **Goddess**? Sion wonders returning Millers gaze before asking.

“..... so, when did you start watching?”

On hearing that, Miller once again fixes his eyes on Sion and replies.

“From when, you say? To that question, I shall answer that I saw nothing. I cannot think of commenting on anything without the proper knowledge. That’s why today, I came here to you with a single question.”

Sion nods before answering.

“Then I shall change my question. What is the question, I wonder?”

On hearing that, with his piercing eyes, he looks straight at Sion, no, more than that, he looks straight into Sion.

“..... tell me everything, Sion Astal. Everything from the

beginning.” He says with a low voice.

♦ ♦ ♦

He gave orders to the cells in his brain.

Move. Move. Move.

Think. Think. Think.

He desperately gave orders to the cells in his brain.

What to do? what to do? what to do?

What’s the situation?

What are the circumstances?

“.....”

But, from the core of his brain, a different command was issued.

Bothersome. Bothersome. Bothersome.

Time to sleep. Time to sleep. Time to sleep.

Of course, the situation was such that, even if he acted sluggishly, it was tense and he was already too late for various things; and, even though he couldn’t sleep, the brain tissue of the lazy fellow was screaming.

Yes, goodnight! Yes, goodnight! Already sluggishly sleepy. Want to go bye-bye. Want to go bye-bye in my bed, into my

fluffy fluffy dreams, not wanting to wake up, and that's it. Please take care of things, goodbye...

Ryner Lute

Postscript.

Please don't look for me.

A stupid order along those lines.

"....."

Gu, while enduring, Ryner stifles a yawn and looks up to the clock hanging from the wall. Noon. He is sleepy..... sleepy as he had not slept a wink since escaping prison yesterday morning. Since then, he has been running back and forth the streets of Roland for the last 30 hours checking out the current situation here. Finally it is time... to leave the country. He went to the appointed place but Ferris was not there, then Kiefer came back, then Ferris lost consciousness.

And now... now, Ryner and gang are at Ashold dango tea-house. He was supposed to meet up with Ferris at eight-thirty in the morning and cross the border by noon, leaving Roland, entering Nelpha, yet...

"....."

Silently, Ryner looks at the peerless beauty eating dango in front of him.

Ferris looks worry less as she digs into her dangos continuously without a care in the world.

"....."

Ryner then shifts his attention to the person beside Ferris, her sister, who is also eating dango. The two of them are eating

dangos in a very carefree manner. He stares at the huge amount of discarded dango sticks...

Who is going to pay for all that? Ryner trembles in cold fear
Well, when that happens, there's always the desperation move 'eat-and-run'. So, I'll try not to think about it for now.

"....."

On top of that his red haired childhood friend sitting beside him, Kiefer, is also eating dango. She makes a comment on how delicious the dango tastes to which Ferris eye widens in response.

"Ohh!! You can tell the taste!?"

Upon hearing that, Kiefer managed a response with a pressured look. "Eh, yeah, erm..... yes. I thought that this is something different from other dango....."

"You can tell that much!?" Ferris squeals in delight.

"Fohfohbabakaludo!"

Iris, with her mouth stuffed with dango, shouts the incantation-like words.

"..... er, erm, yeah. Probably....." Kiefer replies.

"Oyaji! She's a sharp one! Bring in another thirty sticks!"

"Thirty ~ sticks!"

"Ehhhh, thirty sticks!? No, well, er, eating only dango....."

Instantly, both Ferris and Iris has a shocked look on their faces...

"Kid-, kidding, kidding..... I really want to eat dango you

know.....”

“Right!”

“Fohloh!”

Ryner makes a sidelong glance at Kiefer who is being playfully tossed around by the troublesome sisters. He fights against his sleepiness, trying to think.

So to speak, the fact is, there is really no time to slack around like this. Yet, He and Kiefer listen to Ferris's story while eating dango.

Firstly, with regards to Kiefer, ahh ~, what’s that again. Erm, the reason why she came back.....

At that moment, Ryner remembers her words earlier in the room.

With her entire face red, Kiefer had said, *“..... erm, I came back..... to meet Ryner.....”*

Woah! Woah! Woah! Wait, stop remembering it. Well, anyway, the reason she came back is something along those lines, eh ---, it’s troublesome to deal with it so let’s leave it at that. Yup. Then again, if that’s the real reason why she came back, then she won’t enter the current Roland anyway.

Erm, what about Sion, who’s also her childhood friend?

“.....”

Ryner looks across the pile of thirty dango sticks, stacked on the table, at the half obscured face of Kiefer and asked,

“You know, Kiefer...”

“Hn?”

“Do you want to meet Sion.....”

On hearing that, she looks a little sad and shakes her head.

“..... erm, I do want to meet him, but..... But, it’s not like I came back to see Sion. For Ryner I..."

Instantly, Ryner panics. “Right, okayyy, I got it! You don’t really want to meet Sion?”

“Yeah. After talking to Ryner, in the current situation, even if I were to meet him.....”

On hearing that, Ryner nods. “I think so too" he says as he returns to his thoughts

That’s right.

Even if Kiefer were to meet the Sion now, she would be disappointed, I guess. At any rate he, the current Sion, even refused to meet Ferris, who had been part his everyday company not long ago.

Even if Kiefer were to head towards the castle now, it would be strange if he actually grants her an audience.

As he was thinking, Kiefer.....

At that moment, as if she completely sees through his thoughts, says

“..... I’ll go together with you.”

“Eh?”

“Ryner, you are leaving Roland, aren’t you? Then, let me go with you. It’s for this reason I.....”

Just as she was about to make another declaration,

“Oi, woman! If you don’t hurry and eat up, the most tasty instant will escape from the dango, you know!” Ferris interrupts with a raised voice suddenly.

Hearing that, Ryner looks in Ferris direction and met her eyes. As always, she wore an expressionless face. Queerly, it seems even more expressionless than usual. Rather, what is this? Isn’t this the same look as when I first met her? Eh, what’s with her?

“..... are you angry?”

On hearing Ryner’s words, Ferris tilts her head.

“Hn? What are you talking about?”

“No, I thought your face was a little expressionless.”

“I always have that face on.”

“Is that so?”

“Yeah.”

“Really?”

“Uh-huh.”

“Then it’s fine I guess.”

“It’s fine.” Saying that, Ferris starts eating her dango again.

Somehow, it felt different than usual. If it were as usual, she would start an extremely bothersome moronic story..... ah wait, was she always this quiet whenever she eats dango? Ryner ponders.

Was she?

“.....”

As he was pondering about all these things, he suddenly stopped, remembering that this isn’t the time to do that, and returns to his original thoughts. Before long he notices that beside him, Kiefer has a troubled nervous expression, and so he asks gently.

“..... what’s up?”

“Not-, nothing.” she shook her head quickly.

“Ah, is it because you’re at a loss for not being able to stop eating dango? Don’t worry about it too much. If you play along with Ferris, you will never have enough lives for that, you know?”

Hearing that, Kiefer has that troubled look again, she looks nervously at Ferris, then turns to Ryner,

“..... erm” she murmured.

Oh well, whatever. Ryner proceeds with his own thoughts again.

In any case the thing on the top of the priority list that he has to think about, is the matter regarding the attack on Ferris.

Clearly speaking, she’s strong. He wouldn’t be able to predict the outcome of a serious one-on-one fight between him and her, that’s how strong she is; that strength put her in the top ranks of Roland. Even if several members of those mage knights, officially known as the strongest unit of the country, were to be assembled, they would be no match for her. On top of that, if she was running away instead of fighting, even if say Iris was taken hostage, she was capable of retrieving her and escaping --- well, then again, even with a squad of mage knights as her opponents, she could still triumph over them.

But yet, there was a person who could single-handedly take her on. No, according to Ferris she was almost killed, it seemed. Just a while ago she was in a situation where both her arms and legs were torn, and she could only wait for death to claim her.

“.....”

On recalling that... on recalling that story, even now, Ryner feels like shivering. If she had actually died... If she were to disappear, and not be eating dango in front of him now.

What should I do?

He feels like shivering in fear.

He wants to save Sion. That’s what he decided and subsequently embarked on a journey with that in mind. Yet the pursuer sent out by that same Sion almost killed Ferris. No, whether that was something undertaken as an order from Sion is still not clear. But, at the very least, a subordinate of Sion almost killed Ferris. In response to that thought.

“.....”

In response to that thought, Ryner had a ‘you-got-me’ look as he grimaced. He felt a little afraid. The reason being what happened this time round might happen again in future.

Since he had decided to move forward from hereon.

Since he had decided to move forward from hereon to save Sion.

And in the course of that, any sacrifices incurred along the way would be his responsibility.

That was...

A realization that hit him pretty early on in the course of his journey.

A realization that hit him at the expense of his most important partner's life.

If Ferris hadn't come and save me. If she's not leaving the country with me. If she's not saving Sion with me.

No, even not for those reasons. If Ryner hadn't decided that they should act separately, she wouldn't have been almost killed.

This time round it was coincidental that her brother, Lucile Eris, had appeared to save her. Or so it seems. But they can't count on being so lucky the second, or third, and time again. There wouldn't be a next time, hopefully.

Or if there's a next time, Ferris would be killed and he won't be able to see her stupidly eating dango like this in front of him again.

"....."

No, not just Ferris... Iris, Kiefer, Arua, Kuku as well, and also any new comrades who would be joining Ryner's company from hereon as he moves forward. If he makes a mistake, they might be killed.

By Sion.

By Roland.

He realized just a moment ago.

While he was listening to Ferris's story as they were eating dango, Ryner showed a seemingly normal, 'everything-is-fine', sleepy looking face.

“.....”

But the truth was totally different. Involuntarily Ryner nearly shouts out.... from the rising fear within that grips him.

He thought that he had already made a seriously determined decision, but he was still a little naive. This was the path he had sought to walk.

Against Sion.

The path that leads to making Sion, the man committed to becoming the supreme ruler of the southern continent, his enemy.

Ryner remembers that day, when Sion wept while pulling out a knife despite...

...Even though Sion is really a gentle person.

...Even though Sion is more innocent than anyone else.

But yet he recalled the face of Sion, determination to move forward engraved on it. With the heavy burdens he shouldered as he walked ever forward.

Ryner is fed up with it; he is fed up with himself who has his hands full just trying to escape.

“..... he was in pain all this while.”

But, Sion was always smiling. Sometimes he did put on a tired face, a face that seemed on the verge of crying, but in the end, he would still be smiling. Even though he was in so much pain that he could die; even though he was in such despair, he always smiled in the end.

“.....”

Through the earlier incident, Ryner finally understands. Ferris was attacked and almost killed, and the one who attacked her was Froaude.

Miran Froaude.

Descendant of the holy knight Halford Miran. However, he (Frouade) was too dark to be called a holy knight. He was a killer demon who obliterated anything that stood in the way of his lord, his supreme ruler. Clearly speaking, he was the worst.

Ryner had always thought that the king who had Froaude in his employment would be the worst.

To which Froaude, with a look full of contempt for Ryner, replied...

"Humans are animals who struggle and fight to survive. To eat, to protect their pride, to lead better lives, to protect their loved ones, and also to save themselves from getting killed by someone else..... humans struggle and fight.

To have no sacrifices, to have everyone smiling as they live..... that's delusional. Such a world doesn't exist. The world is not as naive a place as you think." Frouade concluded.

The world is not as naive a place as you think.

But those words...

Whose words were those?

Who the hell was the one driven up to a corner, despaired with the world, and still kept on moving forward?

“.....”

Ryner recalled. He recalled the first time he met Froaude. It was at the house where the children of the first prince of Nelpa and his commoner mistress were putting up at, Toale’s house.

Froaude appeared to kill Toale, who was of royal blood and highly regarded by the populace.

But that was a long time ago. During the time when Sion became king, Ryner was released from prison and just began on a journey with Ferris, it was during then. In other words, since then, that detestable Froaude was already working for Sion.

Ever since then Sion had already started bearing the darkness within his heart, which was not shown to Ryner.

That was definitely.

“.....”

That was definitely incredibly painful, he thought. Well,

“..... it’s too late to notice it only now.”

Ryner said stupidly as he looks out the window of the tea-house. The window was not facing south, an unusual thing, but instead was facing north, a place where Sion was not at. That direction do not point to where Roland was but instead where Imperial Nelpha should be.

Ryner looked intently outside the window. The rain appeared to have lightened considerably compared to the morning. Unexpectedly, after killing time in this tea-house, this might be a good time to leave the country. Crossing the border in the rain would indeed prove bothersome, and if they start now, by

the time they cross the border, the sun would have set. Meanwhile, the rain would probably continue to fall at this intensity.

A rainy twilight.

It was a convenient time to slip past the border guards with the reduced visibility. And well, after crossing the border and entering Nelpha, what should they do next?

“.....”

At that moment, he recalled the current situation of Imperial Nelpha which Luke had shown him earlier this morning. Well, the main points of the situation are as follows.

Roland, in this war of attrition, was carrying out large-scale massacres as a show to destroy the fighting spirit of the other countries.

If Roland failed, it would be taken lightly by the other countries, and as a country that had broken an alliance, Roland would have to stand against a coalition composed of the other countries in the southern continent.

That’s why Roland had to, through the large-scale massacres, completely crush Imperial Nelpha, in order to minimize the loss of lives in the war.

Once Nelpha’s massacres were shown to the rest of the world, the other countries, having their desire to fight crushed, would surrender without fighting, well, those were Roland’s real intentions.

And, in order to achieve all that, Roland will kill off all the royalty of Nelpha, and after displaying that to the other countries, it will tell them that if they were to surrender now their royalty will be spared and welcomed into the ranks of

Roland nobility, that's the strategy.

With that strategy, if all went well with killing off Nelpha's royalty, and displaying the might of Roland, everything will go well after that. That was the power that Roland held, as the greatest nation in the southern continent. Even if Roland were to attack head on without resorting to any such means, Sion would still be able to subjugate the entire southern continent, but that will probably take up a lot of time. Moreover, what he wanted was to achieve that goal in the shortest amount of time, with the least amount of sacrifices. Well, so to speak, that is how it is with Roland's current situation.

On the other hand, what was happening in Imperial Nelpha?

"....." As Ryner pondered, he grimaced involuntarily.

Nelpha is currently in the worst possible scenario. Firstly, the only person who could end this war, Gread Nelphi

"By offering my head and the imprisonment of my son, Prince Starnel..... in exchange for that offer, will you stop massacring Nelpha's people?"

That was the offer he had decided to present to Roland...

..But his stupid son Prince Starnel,

"I don't care what happens to the country! I don't want to be captured by Roland."

And with that, he killed King Gread Nelphi. With this, Roland could no longer achieve the outcome of ending the war with a minimum loss of lives. However, the stupidity of the Prince Starnel did not end here. Starnel then ordered ten thousand soldiers to repel Roland's army that was advancing northwards, and on top of that, he took command of the remaining troops, and started massacring and looting the

populace from within Nelpha. After looting, he intents to escape to some place.

That's why it is the worst possible scenario. With this, Nelpha no longer has anyone who could legitimately surrender to Roland.

In other words, in order to put on their original show to the other countries, Roland would have to decimate the ten thousand abandoned troops, and furthermore, before reaching Starnel's personally led army, they had to completely raze the streets they would pass through, and finally finish off the remaining troops which Starnel, who had no intention of surrendering, had taken over in a bid to save himself. With this however, even more losses would be sustained than if they were to just fight a head-on war.

However, things were already heading towards that bothersome direction.

But, at this juncture, in this worst case scenario, a ray of hope appears and that is Toale.

The son of the King Gread Nelphi and a commoner mistress, Toale had helped the bewildered Ryner and Ferris by giving them access to the library and putting them up at his house. The kind, good kid loved by the people of Nelpha. Toale Nelphi had taken command of the ten thousand abandoned troops and stopped them from engaging Roland. That is the best of the best news to Roland.

With this turn of events, the possibility of Roland achieving its original goal of minimizing the loss of lives, appears once more.

It is highly likely that the subsequent development will becomes as follows, Toale,

”If I surrender, will you let the ten thousand troops and people off?”

That would probably be his offer but of course Roland would reject that.

You are not Nelpha’s king, correct? If you want to save the ten thousand soldiers, go take the throne from the current Nelpha king, from that stupid prince.

We’ll accept your surrender once you’ve done that.

And of course, in order to finish the show to the other countries, Roland would then execute Toale, the Nelpha king.

This series of developments are probably unfolding even now. So to speak, taking Toale’s personality into consideration, this line of development would definitely happen. Doing his best and sacrificing his own life in exchange for that of the people and soldiers, that might even please him. He is that kind of people-loving idiot.

Ryner folded his arms.

Well, that being the case, in the current Imperial Nelpha, Toale Nelphi’s great battle is just beginning. That should really be an unreasonably great battle. Toale’s ten thousand troops will clash with the sixty-eight thousand troops led by stupid Prince Starnel.

And even if Starnel’s forces, which were about seven times larger, were miraculously defeated and the throne was taken, next Toale would immediately surrender to Roland.

Then, with a smiling face, he would be executed.

That miracle, so to speak...

Was sacrificing himself.

This worst case fate was an irony in itself for such a man of righteousness.

With regards to that,

“.....”

If Ryner were to head towards Nelpha; there was only one thing to be done. That is to save Toale, and defeat the stupid prince. On top of that, surrendering Nelpha to Roland and presenting Roland in a good light for now.

But, he wouldn’t let Toale die.

He had to, at the same time, accomplish all that with the least amount of lives lost.

By a method in which nobody would get hurt.

“.....”

Geez, isn’t this damn difficult?

Ryner frowned to himself. Ever since he read the documents regarding Nelpha which Luke handed him this morning, on top of saving Nelpha, he had been thinking about how to save Toale, but somehow, he just couldn’t come up with a good idea.

No, to say that he couldn’t come up with any ideas at all would be a lie. He had thought of several. But with those methods,

“.....”

The number of sacrifices would not be zero. No, it’s not even about whether the number of sacrifices could be brought down to zero or not.

After all, this was a war.

If Ryner made a mistake, an unbelievably large number of lives would be lost. Even if he did not make a mistake, the number of life losses that he had to bear was not insignificant as well.

This is what Sion had had to bear all along.

He had to bear them all alone.

So, what am I to do?

“.....”

What I am supposed to do?

“..... shit.”

Ryner mutters.

Shit, shit, shit, he groans silently.

To fight the Roland army led by the red-haired monster Claugh Klom.

To fight the close to seventy thousand troops led by the stupid Prince Starnel.

To feign ignorance at everything and take Toale away and escape.

Whichever way he decides on, it isn’t good enough. Lots of people would die.

That’s why Ryner gave the order. While groaning *shit, shit, shit*, he ordered his non-working brain. The brain which did nothing and continued to slug until things had turn into such a stupid situation.

While saying *bothersome bothersome*, in the end, it had come to such a worst case situation that he was driven to a corner and had to give orders to his own brain.

Move move move.

Think think think.

What in the world could he do to achieve a breakthrough? What could he do to get a good outcome?

The balance moved. The balance in his head moved. On the plates hanging from each side of the balancing scale, were the lives of people.

The side with many lives, and the side with, not too few lives.

If we were talking about sacrifices, of course the less the better. Therefore, the plate which was heavier would be discarded.

“.....”

That should have been the case, but the scales in Ryner’s head was not moving. Both the plate with many lives and the plate with not too few lives were equally heavy.

The scales are in equilibrium.

That’s why he couldn’t choose.

Shit, he groaned again.

As he did that, his brain teased...

Weakling. You weakling. Just kill and move forward. The sacrifices can’t be helped, can they?

That’s right, he thought. He’s not a magician who could create

any kind of miracle. If it can't be done, it can't be done. But still, if there's some way.....

As he started thinking again, his brain starting talking again.

It's useless it's useless. Stop thinking about such bothersome things, won't you? It's useless. Don't think that your arrogance can save everyone. The world is not as naive as you think. Let it go, people will die, just quickly move forward.

But...

No buts. As you are fretting here, people are dying. Look at the reality. Didn't you always refuse to look at it and just keep on running away. Now, take a look. Take a good look. Take a look at the scenery that Sion has seen. Take a good look at the scenery of despair that he has seen, and make your choice.

Without running away, make you choice properly, and take responsibility.

Get on with the killing and move forward.

Now, which one will you choose?

".....".

Now, which plate of lives on the balance will you sacrifice?

".....".

Now.

Now, decide quickly.

".....".

In response to that voice.

“..... shut up.”

That’s what Ryner answered. In response to the voice born from his own weakness, that’s what he answered.

Then he looked up. As he did that, he saw Ferris, Iris, and Kiefer. After being told to shut up, all three of them were looking at Ryner’s face with a look of surprise on their faces.

Kiefer said.

“Eh. Ah. I’m sorry. Was I too noisy? Ryner has a lot to think about, isn’t it?”

Following that, Iris said.

“Eh --- --- --- --- was I not quiet throughout the whole time? Right? Nee-sama?”

Moving on to the last person, Ferris said.

“.....”

No, as expected, she said nothing.

She just stood up without saying anything, looking straight at Ryner. With her blue pupils, she gazed intently into Ryner’s eyes. As she looked at him, she lifted the chair that she was sitting on and...

“..... telling me to shut up. What do you mean by thatttttttttttt!”

The chair flew.

It came flying so fast that it disappeared from sight momentarily.

“It can’t be.”

As he said that, Ryner promptly attempted to dodge, but his reaction speed just after he broke out of his deep thoughts was pitiful,

“I won’t make it..... gyaaaaaaaaaaa.”

It smacked into his face. The corner of the chair smacks right into his face, setting off an intense pain, and his body flew backwards.

He fell onto the ground. He clutched his face. The pain invaded his whole face. Just as the pain subsided slightly, he looked up, *Damn you, what the hell are you doing*, he wanted to say.

But!

“..... eh? You’re not serious right?”

Ryner uttered without thinking, forgetting what he originally wanted to say because right before his eyes...

Ferris continues on and went to stand on top of the table and jumped. She jumped towards him. She lifted her foot backwards. And adopted a kicking stance, aiming at Ryner’s face.

“Wait, wait, wait, wait a minute, erm, it’s my bad, you don’t need to go to such an extent really.....”

He said, but, his words stopped.

The reason was because Ferris was not wearing her usual armor. She was wearing a strangely cute one-piece dress, with a short skirt portion, *with that, wasn’t it difficult to move in?* In that short moment, Ryner was concerned about that.

She raised her foot backwards. Raising it backwards to the

fullest, and revealing the inside of her skirt.....

“Oi, it’d really be bad if you keep that on. The inside of your skirt is completely visible.....”

As he spoke those words, it was already too late. She launched her kick.

The face again.

The face again.

“Argh!?”

As he shouted, Ryner flew. He spun in the air.

Even if he is done in in this manner, the close-up view was indeed magnificent,

“Ry, Rynerrrrr!?” Kiefer screamed in anguish.

“Kyaaaaa.” Iris screamed in anguish..... no. It was clearly a squeal of total delight.

Well, in any case, under the gaze of the three girls, Ryner flew. His head shattered the window. His upper torso passed through. It was still raining moderately heavy outside and his head was drenched immediately. This time round, he was definitely going to say, *Damn, Ferris, what are you up to! You’ve gone too far! I ain’t forgiving you today, I’m so going to kill you*, he intended to shout out but.

“.....”

He gave up.

Since the rain brought cold relief to his face which was burning from the pain. Since the rain cleared his senses after having gone without sleep for the entire night.

With that, he looks at the sky of Roland.

Despite that it is already noon, he looks up at the sunless sky.

As if it was trying to mimic the feelings of a particular someone, the rain continued falling.

“Now.”

He thought.

Now, what should I do, let’s get back thinking.

Sion, while weeping, had decided to make the sacrifices and move forward.

But, what about me?

In the end, I’m taking the same path.....

At that moment, all of a sudden.

“..... has your head cooled? Ryner.”

He was asked.

Ryner looked up. He propped himself up and looked into the room.

As he did that, he saw Ferris, with her usual emotionless expression, looking towards here.

“..... eh?”

As he pondered, she spoke

“..... I’m asking you whether your head has cooled. Jeez, for someone without any brain matter, you had that look of concentration, worrying about something..... think about the

feelings of those around you!” She yelled angrily.

On hearing that, Ryner, with a look of surprise.

“Eh? Me? Was I so deep in concentration?”

Ferris nodded.

“You were.”

“Seriously ~”

“Damn you! You don’t believe my words.....”

“Ugh, why are you drawing your sword.....”

But she didn’t stop. With her sword drawn, she rushed forward.

“Wah, wah, wah.”

Ryner wanted to run away, but he was too slow.

She smashed the sword into Ryner.

“Gyaaa.”

As he shouted, his whole body flew out of the window.

But her violence did not end here. She jumped out of the window as well and grabbed hold of Ryner’s head. With that, she dragged him across the ground and ran for a while.

As the ground was wet from the rain, it was not really painful to be dragged across, but the occasional stones that he brushed across grazed him.

“Gah, painful. It’s painful, Ferris. Wait, I’m asking you to stop..... aren’t you going too far?”

He called out, and on hearing that.

“.....”

She finally stopped.

Grabbing his neck in a strangling fashion, she pushed him against the ground.

He looked up at her. He looks up at her golden hair, which has already dried after so long but is now soaking wet again, then he looks at her face.

Looking at that face.

“.....”

Ryner frowned involuntarily.

Because he saw a face which could not described as expressionless.

Just now, inside the tea-house, for some reason, Ferris had an even more expressionless look, with no tinge of emotions, than the old days.

On top of him, with his neck held down by her, the face he saw now could not be described as expressionless.

So as to speak.

“.....”

She now had a face that was on the verge of crying.

While pressing him down in a strangling fashion, she looked down at Ryner with a face that was on the verge of crying.

That’s why, on seeing that, Ryner frowned involuntarily.

And then he asked. In a half-joking manner, with a light tone, he asked.

“..... could it be that I’m the cause of that face you’re making now?”

“.....”

With her face that was on the verge of crying, but yet, with a glowering face, she held back her tears and looked intently towards here, and nodded sharply.

Ryner, holding his gaze on her,

“..... was it because of Kiefer?”

However, she quickly shook her head.

“Then.”

Ryner said.

“..... then, was it because the brainless me was making a face that was deep in concentration?”

She did not reply.

She only stared at Ryner.

And he asked.

“..... what kind of face was I making?”

Then she said softly.

A single sentence.

Just one sentence, she murmured.

“..... a face like Sion’s.”

She glowered as she said that. She was really on the verge of crying.

In other words, it was that.

She was once again unsettled.

Because Ryner made the same face as Sion. Not consulting with anyone, merely bearing everything alone, moving forward, that same face.

And then, Sion disappeared. All of a sudden, he became mad, weeping sorrowfully, he disappeared.

And on top of that, Ryner also disappeared. Captured by Sion and imprisoned, he disappeared before Ferris.

All alone, she shivered in fear.

Despite knowing that.

Just yesterday morning, she found Ryner in his cell and was crying, despite having seen that scene before him, he still didn't get it.

There were so many friends around him, who worried about him, there was no real need to bear everything by himself.

He didn't have to bear all the responsibility from hereon all by himself, that was something he didn't understand promptly.

The very same thing.

"....."

Even though it was the very same thing that Sion didn't understand.

If he's troubled, he could consult with the rest.

Before being driven to the wall, he could have consulted with the rest, even though that was the very same thing Ryner had thought of Sion,

“.....”

She was on the verge of crying.

Even though Ferris was someone who would be so happy that she could rise up to heaven just from eating dango, she was on the verge of crying at a dango shop.

He was stupidly being fed up all by himself.

From hereon, these people will be with me as I move forward, yet I was fretting by myself, being fed up with things.

It’s just as what she said.

Just as what she said, I’m a brainless guy indeed.

Without understanding anything all that, who can I save?

Ryner looked up at Ferris.

With a cornered face, he looked up at her.

The he said.

“..... you know, Ferris.”

“What.”

“I had been thinking about a lot of things, can I talk about them?”

On hearing that.

On hearing that, Ferris returned to her expressionless face.

But embedded within that expressionless face, was a tinge of emotion which Ryner once again was able to decipher. It was not the same face she had a while ago.

Her face was displaying a proper emotion.

A somewhat satisfied, somewhat pleased face.

“Talk about them? With me?”

“Yeah.”

As Ryner acknowledged, she seemed to be even more pleased.

“Won’t do. You’re dying here.”

She tightened her grip on his neck,

“Ehhhhhh, wait..... gyaaaaa.”

In the end, the same development unfolded.

Just before he really die, he broke free from that position,

“You, you, you’re seriously killing me!!”

“Of course.”

“Ugh, as I’ve always said, at that juncture, you’re supposed to dispute that!”

It became the usual antic.

And Ryner, in response to that,

“..... ha, haha.”

He started laughing by himself.

“What’s so funny?”

Even as she said that, he continued laughing for a while, and then he looked up at the sky again.

The rain was still heavy. Though not as heavy as this morning. With that strong wind blowing, those large clouds would be blown away, and it would probably stop.

At that moment, he noticed that the wind was blowing northwards,

“Oi oi, even though we are heading into Nelpha, yet it’s also raining in Nelpha.”

He said wearily.

But, even so, it was fine. Things would definitely work out somehow.

He thought.

The reason was because he’s not going to run away.

“.....”

Because he had friends.

Because he was not alone, and he’s not running away.

Ryner looked at Ferris.

Then he turned towards the tea-house. Kiefer, with an umbrella in her hand, was about to rush towards here, but beside her, with a look of delight, Iris dashed out into the rain.

“Ah, ah, Iris-chan, if you don’t take an umbrella, you’re going to catch a cold!”

Kiefer chased after her frantically.

Looking intently at that, Ryner said (to Ferris).

“Even if I have an umbrella now, thanks to you, I might catch a

cold. My clothes are all drenched."

As he said that, he looked at his shirt and pants that he borrowed from the tea-house.

On hearing that, Ferris suddenly seemed to remember something important, with a 'you just reminded me' face,

"Ah! I forgot!"

"Huh? What?"

"Right! I've forgotten all about it after being attacked en route, but I've prepared some clothes for you....."

She was interrupted.

"Denied!"

Ryner said.

"Hm?"

She looked here with a look of displeasure.

In response to that, Ryner scowled,

"You did it eh? The knapsack that Iris was carrying had a pair of pants with a mouse embroidered at the crotch area, and other than that, it was completely naked-looking, and with the shirt that hides only the navel, making a complete stupid set of clothes, eh?"

As he said that, she nodded her head sharply.

"Orhh, you saw that? So, given that you are going full speed on the pathway to hentai-dom, naturally, underneath those pants you are wearing, you can put on those hentai....."

“I’m not wearing that! Stop talking about foolish things. Let’s get inside? We’d seriously catch a cold. Even not so, there’s no reason for us to stay here. Let’s get back inside the tea-house and get changed, and we’ll set off immediately. Just a moment ago..... a pretty good idea just came to me.”

Ryner said.

And then, he once again, looked through the veil of rain towards the lands in the north.

After passing through the highway, and crossing the borders and entering Imperial Nelpha, there would only be bothersome things to deal with.

But even so, he might actually have arrived at a solution that could solve everything.

It was in the instant when he was smashed by Ferris’s sword.

In the instant when his sleepy head was bashed.

“..... am I a masochist?”

A good idea which made him think of making a comeback at himself.

A way to fight the Roland army led by the red hair monster Claugh Klom.

A way to fight the close to seventy thousand troops led by stupid Prince Starnel.

A way to feign ignorance at everything and save Toale.

Now, where should he start?

“.....”

At that moment, Kiefer finally came up to them.

She sheltered the drenched Ryner and Ferris with an umbrella.

For some reason, she had a slightly sulking face.

“Geez, jumping out here with all this rain, did the two of you have some kind of secret conversation~?”

On hearing that, he smiled.

He looked at Kiefer, then at Ferris.

“..... nothing secretive. I’ll tell you all everything. I’ll no longer bear everything all by myself and tell you all everything. Everything about the superrrrrrrrrr bothersome strategy I have to execute in Nelpha. That’s why, with me.....”

But what he was about to say was something that was kind of embarrassing, so he averted his eyes from them. He looked again in the direction of Nelpha.

Then he told them straight.

To the two of them.

To his first comrades who would follow this cowardly, languid guy who makes lots of mistakes.

“..... will you all follow me?”

As he said that, the two of them answered at the same time.

Speaking at the same time.

With a truly unwavering, strong voice.

“Yeah!”

“Nope!”

“.....”

Ehhhh? No, erm..... just now, I heard a ‘nope’?

No, well, suddenly speaking together at the same time, can’t really expect it to be in unison.

But.

“..... well, shall we go?”

Ryner smiled wryly as he turned around.

As he did that, Ferris and Kiefer were looking this way at him. Behind them, Iris was rolling on the rain-soaked ground.

They were his first comrades.

The enemy was the Hero King with the strongest army in the southern continent.

And the seventy thousand soldiers led by the stupid prince of Nelpha.

On the other hand, the group here comprised of a sluggish guy and three girls.

To anyone seeing this, it seemed like they have no chance of winning at all. Others would probably call them idiots and fools.

But for him.

For him,

“..... it’s enough.”

Ryner murmured and smiled faintly.

And he did think so. Not on the orders of Sion or anyone else, it was really an incredible thing for them to follow him like this.

There were people who believed in him and thus following him.

If so.

If that's the case, then without any fear or thought of running away, he could move forward, couldn't he?

"....."

Once again, he looked at the sky. He looked up at the sky from which rain continued to fall. And then towards the south where Sion was at. And then towards the north where the red hair monster, the stupid prince, and Toale were at.

After looking at all that, he looked at the faces of his comrades again, then said.

"..... well, let's do it."

With a clear voice.

"Firstly, to start off, let's clean up the mess in Nelpha."

That was what he declared.

Several days later.

Deep into the night.

At a Roland camp erected within Imperial Nelpha.

A short distance away from that, on a hill, was Claugh Klom ---

The black hand death god was standing there alone.

With stern eyes, he surveyed Nelpha's scenery.

"....."

Even though it was already late into the night, bright reddish lights were shining from the town-scape. But there was no longer anyone there. Earlier at dusk, the Roland army led by Claugh had arrived here, destroying and setting everything on fire, razing all in sight.

Only ruins lay there.

Even though the magical fires were still burning in the remaining houses, giving them a red shine, before long, that too would disappear.

And after that, the only things remaining would be corpses, ruins, and despair.

Despite seeing all that.

"....."

I'm already more or less used to this, he thought.

It had been a few weeks since he entered Nelpha.

All he saw were such devastating scenes. These were devastating scenes which he knew well.

Scenes of war.

Killing people. Killing people. Killing people. Blood spewing, screams booming, but yet, he went on killing people, endlessly.

He had heard someone asking for help.

He had heard someone cursing him.

He had heard cries of vengeance.

And in response to all that, Claugh,

“.....”

He killed.

He killed without any hesitation.

But the war did not end.

The war did not end.

It should not have come to this, according to their initial expectations.

They had expected Nelpha to completely surrender much earlier. The people should have been saved after the deaths of the royalty of Nelpha. And thereafter, they also should have been able to avoid fighting the other countries.

But that did not come to pass.

A number of problems came up, and in the end, that did not come to pass.

What would Sion think of that, he thought for an instant. He, who wanted to move forward with the least number of sacrifices, would probably be greatly hurt by this never ending war.

And then Claugh thought it was a good thing that he had come here. It's a good thing that such unpleasant work was not carried out by others.

That's why it was a good thing that Sion was not here.

It was a good thing that Calne was not here.

Perhaps, it was also a good thing that Luke and his other comrades were not here, he thought.

"....."

At that moment.

He thought of something somewhat unpleasant. He thought of Noa's face when he said that he was going to war again. She, who was left behind in Roland, with rare navy blue hair, and a show of resoluteness but occasional innocence within her blue eyes, which vanished in an instant as well.

Which was due to tears flowing out of her eyes, and as if to dispel that memory of her, he shook his head.

She should just forget about everything and attain happiness. This. For this murderer me, there was no need for her to think about me and weep for me.

He looked intently at his black hand. His right hand which was imbued with a curse and colored black.

The right hand which had already taken countless lives.

For a murderer like him, it would be laughable for only him to attain happiness.

It was just not possible.

That's why he got used to it quickly. With killing people. With

throwing away his own happiness.

And he turned his eyes to the darkness that lay beyond the burning streets, a flashy work of his.

And started considering.

Right now, he was thinking about how he could continue to show off Roland's brutality to the other countries without killing the populace and wrapping things up, what should he do? That was what he was pondering.

In order to do that, the most important thing now was to get in touch with Toale Nelphi, the son of Gread Nelphi.

But his location was unknown. Despite the fact that Toale was leading ten thousand troops, his intelligence could not yet get hold of where he was.

If he could somehow succeed in doing that, things could take a better turn.....

".....”

At that moment.

Claugh suddenly turned around. Behind where he was standing on the top of the hill, was a forest, which was dark in comparison to the burning streets.

He could feel something moving in that darkness.

But in response to that, he did not react much.

Since he had come to this land.

Since leaving the territory of Roland, and coming to Nelpha, the same type of situation had occurred again and again.

Destroying the streets. Listening to the curses. And attacked assassins wielding knives and swords, men, women, children, bearing hatred for their comrades or family who were killed.

Die. Die. Die. I will let you taste my hatred for killing my comrades!

And Claugh had always answered them. He killed every one of them. Those were his orders, and Claugh had thought that was necessary as well.

That's why he was not surprised.

He was not surprised at noticing that someone was clearly peeping at him from the forest.

He only looked in that direction,

"..... come forward if you want to die."

He said.

The presence in the forest moved as if it was reacting to his words. The killing intent was closing in straight on towards here.

But Claugh did not make any stance.

The reason was because the enemy's killing intent was too weak.

No, not that it was really that weak. A normal soldier might not even emit that much. But, with this level.

It was not possible to kill the death god of the battlefield --- Claugh Klom.

With a sad look in his eyes, he looked at the darkness in that forest.

The enemy would probably lose his life once he comes out of the forest. He had no intention of letting him feel any pain or agony.

He would end it in an instant.

Claugh lifted his black, cursed right hand.

In an isntant.

The enemy appeared.

But in response to the movements of the enemy,

“..... wha.”

Claugh uttered without thinking.

As the unknown hidden assailant dashed out of the forest, he released a killing intent that was ten times stronger than before.

His movement was considerably fast as well.

No, it was not just fast. Moving almost as fast as Claugh, he rushed toward here in a straight line.

The enemy’s figure was visible to Claugh.

Clad in black, and his face veiled in black. Clothes used by assassins to blend into the darkness. A knife in his hand, he reached out for Claugh’s head.

“..... this is bad.”

He promptly dodged it. But yet, he was slightly grazed. No, he had allowed it to happen. As the knife came slicing towards his head, while barely dodging the line of attack,

“Shit!”

Claugh swung his left arm. He had intended to make a grab at the enemy’s face but failed. He had wanted to unveil him, but as expected, the enemy did not yield.

The enemy swung his knife, aiming for Claugh’s arm. Specifically at the artery of his wrist. From just that moment of exchanges, this was clearly a high level fight. A detestable level of skill in handling the knife.

In response to that, a smile floated on Claugh’s lips. The opponent’s strength pretty much rival his own.

No, perhaps, he was stronger than himself. Of course, he wouldn’t really know until they fight it to the end.

“.....”

But even so, he was smiling in delight.

Since this was the first real enemy he had met in this lands.

Ever since he came to Nelpha, he had only massacred endlessly, and now, this was the first opponent who might be able to kill him.

Claugh daringly forced his arm towards the knife that was aiming for his artery. With that, the knife missed the artery and pierced through his arm, stolen from the opponent as a consequence.

In that instant, the enemy was surprised.

In that instant,

“I shall take your life here.”

Claugh churned up his arm that was pierced through by the knife. In an attempt to hit his opponent with his palm.

However, with abnormal reflexes, the enemy dodged that.

But Claugh had read that. The enemy dodged right. But, with that level of strength, the enemy would probably have barely dodged it. And then the next attack began.

However, Claugh's attack did not end with his palm-face move. With that, his arm continued to stretch forward. As he did so, the knife that had previously pierce through his arm was being aimed at the enemy's head,

"....."

With that, everything should come to an end.

It was executed with perfect timing.

If he could dodge this, then,

"....."

Then, he would have to be a monster.

However, the enemy somehow dodged it. While the knife managed to come slicing into the veil, what came after was empty space.

This is bad, he thought.

The next attack came. But, since he thought it had ended with the knife, he let his guard down a little.

He set his sight on the enemy. As he did that, the enemy's kick was about to fly in. In response to that, Claugh used his fist to receive the attack.

The kick and his fist clashed. Normally, the kick would have won. If Claugh had lost, he would have died. If he got struck back from this amount of force, what would followed would be the severance of his head.

But,

"Don't take me lightly!"

And he won against the kick. With his fist, he deflected his opponent's kick.

The enemy fell back a few steps away from Claugh as a result of the impact.

And at that moment, the enemy called out for the very first time.

Looking intently at Claugh.

Looking straight at him.

"Monstrous strength."

That was a voice that he had heard before.

A sleepy, languid, unmotivated voice which he had heard before.

An annoyed voice that didn't take life seriously.

Claugh's grin became even wider on hearing that. *I see. That's how it was.*

"..... Ryner Lute."

As his name was called, the enemy threw away the sliced end of the veil as a result of the previous exchange.

It was indeed a languid, annoyed face.

"Already found out?"

He said lightly. He seemed relaxed.

But, his killing intent remained.

What did he come here for But he (Claugh) wasn't going to

ask. With that amount of killing intent, it was clear why he had come. But,

“..... if I get serious, do you seriously think you can beat me?”

Claugh said, and Ryner made a troubled face.

“..... is that so? Difficult to say perhaps?”

Even with a perplexed face as he asked, he should be very well aware of the answer.

If they fought seriously, who would be stronger?

It was a matter of the occasional luck[1].

Their strength were well matched. This was the second time they fought. The first time was for fun. This time round, it was for real.

But from the series of exchanges just now, they could already tell each other’s strength.

So in the end, it was a matter of the occasional luck. Both sides couldn’t afford to go easy.

That’s why,

“..... whoever dies first, there’s something I’d like to ask you, what’s the meaning of this? What did you come here for?”

Claugh asked.

On hearing that, Ryner,

“Eh? Well, about that.....”

He seemed about to answer.

But, as expected, there was no need for that. It wasn't necessary right from the start. After having felt the killing intent from Ryner, it was clear what he was here for.

That's why it was a feint. A feint of words.

As Ryner was replying, Claugh pulled the knife out of his arm. He threw it. And Ryner had a look of surprise on his face. And he promptly attempted to dodge.

But it was too late.

He was too slow.

Claugh released his right arm.

He released his curse.

He was going to put everything to an end.

But what was it for?

What was he taking the lives of people for?

However, the answer was a simple one.

This was a battlefield.

And Ryner Lute was an enemy.

Then there was only one answer.

Only one thing to do to Ryner.

"....."

One thing to do to his enemy, and that is,

"..... kill!!"

While releasing the curse of his right arm, Claugh Klom shouted.

Afterword

Right, we're now in the second month of the consecutive releases!

I'm dying! I'm dying!

I screamed as I start writing the afterword.

No, you see, the Denyuuden here seems to be on the receiving end of a great upheaval, so everything's going hectic. It has become something terrible. Aside from the manuscript, I'm so swamped with work that I could die.

To start off, terrible thing number 1!!

Short story releases will cease from now on! (eh!?)

In other words, the editorial department hopes that I can write a "Roland Revolution Chapter". As I was groping for the places I can write about, I decided to stop writing the short stories and spend time on that! And that's how things have become, now that there's no more "Toriaezu Densetsu no Yuusha no Densetsu (The Legend of the Legendary Heroes Anyway)" series, 2 or 3 volumes of the longer, greater content-based Roland Revolution Chapters will contain the short stories I've written to date.

Just as I was about to make an advertisement to the world about the succeeding series of "Toriden", that is "Denyuuden SHOW 1", I have to stop that as a new development unfold.

And that will be, the new series will start selling in the next month!

And the title is.

"Shinyuuden Kakumeihen Ochita Kuori Yuusha no Densetsu 1 (Shinyuuden Revolution Chapter The Legend of the Fallen Dark Hero 1)".

Yeah!

The title is long!? (LOL)

The contents will be surrounding the blank period of two years in which Sion became king, which can be said to be made up of fairly important content to the story of the Denyuuden, which still have many unanswered questions with regards to the Empire of Roland.

What are the pasts of Claugh, Calne, Miller, and Luke, and how did they meet Sion?

What are Ferris and Lucile doing then?

How did Sion carry out the revolution of Roland?

In order to seriously pan out that important story, I've also stopped the serializations in Doramaga[2].

See? Isn't this a terrible thing? Right?

Well, and after this and that, terrible thing number 2!!

Because of that reason as well, the short story serialization

will stop.

The part 1 and part 2 of the short story that will be included in the Doramaga published at the end of December and end of January will be the final chapters of the 6-year long Denyuuden serialization.

Even though my serialization had already been running for a long period of six years, it kept doing well recently in the Doramaga survey, and you guys are reading this and giving me such tremendous support, but yet, I selfishly want to write the revolution chapter and stop the serialization, with regards to this, I'm feeling pretty apologetic..... but even when I'm feeling that as well, I have decided to make sure what I'm doing here will make you guys even gladder.

Of course, in exchange for stopping the serialization, next year onward, I'll present an even more and better Denyuuden, so please continue supporting me, thanks in advance!!

Now now, let's move on to the third matter! (There's more~!!)

As I stumbled upon my unread manuscripts in an old box, suddenly, my super capable editor in charge, M-san, who has nurtured me all this while, said something like this.

"Hey Kagami-kun."

"Yes?"

"The other day, it was the first time I praise your manuscript right?"

"Yeah you did."

"You know."

"Yes."

"About the praising matter."

"Yes."

"You graduated didn't you?"

"Eh?"

"After getting praised by me, who has become famous for never praising anything, doesn't that mean you've graduated?"

"Eh? Eh? Erm, why that suddenly....."

"Well, I've nurtured you this far. I'm really happy. Well then, please keep doing your best."

"Like I said, what's this about....."

"There's a change in editors!"

"Eeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeehhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh?"

And so, there is a change in editors ~.

At the same time, Toyota-san also have her editor in charge changed, and over her side, such a drama took place. The editor-in-charge said.

"He, Saoti, let's cut away the Super Brief Denyuuden 4-koma included at the start of Dai Denyuuden 1!"

"Eh? Eh? The Super Brief Denyuuden is different from the Battle Royal 4-koma, if M-san cuts the name, the afterword that Kagami-san had written....."

"No, this is a graduation exam....."

"Huh? Graduation? What's with the sudden graduation thing?"

"That of course means that Saoti is going independent! Since the editor is going to change. Now, go get them. Show them!"

"Eeeeeehhhhhhh!? Super bothersome!"

So whether Saoti did scream out in that manner or not, I have no idea but still went ahead and wrote that anyway, and with that extremely well done 4-koma,

"Graduate!"

The editor-in-charge yelled and left.

And so, well, even when I wrote it like a comedy, but to me, my editor-in-charge is like my second parent, and I really respected him, and this parting gives me a mixed feeling of fear as well as pride.

But above all that, what I really want to say is, without M-san discovering me and nurturing me, Denyuuden, Elwin[3], and Kagami Takaya will not have existed, and my thanks are never enough.

That's why I'm writing a personal message in a 'public place' like this.

M-san, thank you very much. It's my pride to have been able to work with you for the last 7 years. I'll never forget your kindness. I look forward to working with you again one day.

And I think Toyota Saoti also feels the same way.

That's why, take your time to recuperate, one day, we'll work together again. I'll always be waiting for you.

And so, after graduating from the great M-san's care, I have

some thoughts.

I have to show a even more awesome face. Meaning "Toriden" and my "serialization" have come to an end.

I have to do something more interesting. Something that will please you all even more. Something more awesome. I shall start from here and make something to show that I'm really working hard, to the M-san who's watching from afar.

Denyuuden, as well as Kagami Takaya, will start to challenge something new, so everyone, please support me!!

And with that, I shall introduce you to my new editor-in-charge.

And so, my temporary new editor-in-charge is none other than the editor-in-chief of Fantasia label, K-tou-san.

"Geez, Kagami-kun, I'm really busy, so stop staying such things on your own ~."

So as to speak, the one who's gradually revealing my selfishness, is none other than the one who's also famous among the people on other levels, the super beautiful editor-in-chief-sama. Slightly older than me, the so called young executive right? Elite right? Young-exec right? (customary distasteful laugh)

When K-tou-san and I met up, we had an abnormally passionate talk.

"Are you going to the motor show this time?"

"Yep."

"Uwah, I'm so envious."

And so, it's about cars huh!

Jokes aside, for someone abnormally busy like K-tou-san, he almost always take into consideration my selfish opinions patiently. I'm really indebted to him.

Anyhow, we're already almost at the end of advertising, but yet, I wanted to stop the serialization out of the blue! I wanted to write the revolution chapter! He not only applauded my decision, but said to me, *Then make something even more awesome!*, *What I have here is awesome!*, he started suggesting, and before I knew it,

"Hey. Hey hey, even though I was the one who initiated the suggestion, before I knew it, it has become something real bothersome..... hey, heyyyyyyyyyyyyy?"

As expected of the young executive.

And this was how it went.

So, with this and that, we're all going to work hard together.

Please continue to support Denyuuden from hereon!

And so, with that, I'm almost done with reporting my situation, I guess.

Ah, right, I have to write the afterword!

In my previous afterword, I announced the new covers for Denyuuden, and *The books are already launched and lined up in bookstores, so go to the large bookstores and check it out yourself*, I wanted to write this time but, *Please waitttttttt*, a mail saying that came.

Not just the large bookstores! Even for us medium sized bookstores, we took the trouble to order and then, since they came with the wrapper that says "over 2 million copies sold",

we also did a handmade popup that says "over 2 million copies sold" and placed it beside the entire series on the shelves! We'll show you the soul of Denyuuden! So be it small or medium stores, we're doing our best so come take a look.... was what was written in the mail, making me really happy.....

What a touching mail.

"Sorryyyy

Gets launched!

And also at the end of the month, will be the first part of the last chapter of the serialization in the Doramaga. The last chapter will probably be followed with some great special write up, it seems, or is there, I don't know?

Anyway, I think there's gonna be something, so please also support Doramaga.

For details, get a copy of Doramaga, or visit my official website "Kagami Takaya's Healthy Lifestyle", and also the official website of Denyuuden made by Fujimi Shobou!

Well well, I shall see you in next month's Roland's revolution chapter!

Kagami Takaya

Translator's Notes and References

1. ↑ **Occasional Luck:** 時の運, a simple Japanese expression which is really a mouthful to translate to English properly for this context. Simply meant, it means they have to depend on luck. Claugh and Ryner were evenly matched to the point that they had to depend on a moment of chance that could occur through a prolonged fight. Such as a lucky opening or sand flying into his eyes or stuff like that. Just quoting random possibilities though, but the main point of Kagami is to say that from Claugh's POV (point-of-view), they were evenly matched.

2. ↑ **Doramaga:** Dragon Magazine.

3. ↑ **Elwin:** Kagami's first work that span 10 volumes and 2 short story volumes before Denyuuden series started.